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BETTY STANDISH

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THE ROMANCE OF
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THE ARTISTIC SIDE
OF PHOTOGRAPHY

THE ROMANCE OF
SANDRO BOTTICELLI

BETTY STANDISH

A Romance

BY

A. J. ANDERSON



NEW YORK

DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1913

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Under title "The Last of the Traceys"



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TO MY COUSIN
G. E. W.

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BETTY STANDISH

CHAPTER I

A SEPTEMBER MORNING

IF one takes the South-Western to Exeter, and looks out of the carriage window some twenty minutes before the train reaches St. David's, and just after it has passed the small town of Coombe Ottery, one cannot help noticing a large marble house that stands part way up the hill on the other side of the River Otter.

Like many of the Georgian houses round Exeter, Tracey is "classical" in design; but it differs from the other classical houses in so much as it is built of dazzling white marble instead of comfortable bath-stone, and each fluted portico column was originally planned by Messer Leon Battista Alberti for one of the Medici palaces, and imported from Florence at a huge cost.

Above this house there are woods of pine, fir, and chestnut; around it there are groves of beech trees, thickets of rhododendrons, and lawns studded with tall elms; below it the park sweeps down boldly to the river: so, although the house is magnificent,

Nature has removed all suspicion of vulgarity, and anyone with a shred of imagination may fancy that he is looking at a Reynolds background.

In an autograph copy of Roscoe's "Rambles through Devon," published in 1821, which I have by me, there is printed: "Coombe Otter is a mighty agreeable town, where you can lie soft and fare well, with many a pretty lass to pass the time of day." Then the author has pencilled at the foot of the page: "The cyder pressed in the Manor of Tracey is mighty fine; but perish me if the new villa itself be not like a damned sugar plum!" Perish me if the old rip hath not described Tracey mighty aptly! The façade is now toned down with a facing of trellis-work covered with roses, against which the pillars show up bravely.

John Tracey got up with the first of the dawn, drew up the blinds and leant out of his window; the mist was lying in long even billows down the valley; the trees rose through it like sharp rocks, and the tops of the distant hills looked as though they had been cut out of blue-grey cardboard. He had returned home, after more than ten years' absence, only the previous evening, and the indescribable scents of a September morning were floating up from the park.

A tourist who spends a summer in visiting the towns mentioned in his guide book will understand Devon as little as a September tripper understands London; but let him spend an autumn amongst the coombes and valleys, where the soft mist sucks up the smell of the earth through its covering of leaves and pine-needles, and he may get some slight grip of the real Devonshire. These scents of Devonshire are indescribable, but the memory of them will make a Devon man feel very homesick when he is forced to live elsewhere.

John Tracey tubbed himself vigorously, shaved with much discomfort, dressed himself in a suit of worn tweeds, and turned instinctively towards a corner cupboard, wondering if the old butler had remembered; then he smiled, for the cupboard held a tumbler half filled with milk and covered with a square of cardboard to protect it from imaginary dust, a bottle of soda-water and a tin of biscuits: they were arranged exactly as they used to be arranged ten years ago. As a matter of fact, an English butler, who has been in one family for nearly half a century, will never forget any of the family tastes.

John filled up the tumbler with soda, munched a

couple of biscuits, and went down the two flights of stairs—walking softly as he had walked in his father's time, so as not to awake the sleepers—and along the passage that led to the gun-room.

Here again the scents stirred his memory; for who can smell the mingled smells of gunpowder, cleaning rags, oil and boot dubbin, without remembering the old cock pheasant which rose like a rocket from the bed of rhododendrons, and went whirling and twirling away amongst the pine trees? a bird that was as elusive as a woodcock and as disconcerting as a Catherine-wheel. Who can forget the lucky shot that thumped it down among the undergrowth? Who can forget the excessive toughness of the bird at table? For the old English breed of pheasant may be the most sporting bird going, but it cuts as tough as a weathercock.

John sniffed luxuriously and, going to the corner, took down a twelve-foot, spliced hickory which hung from a brass hook close to the ceiling. It was his favourite trout rod, and it felt as stiff and springy as ever: the splice had been wrapped round with fresh leather and bound tight with new whipcord; the line had been renewed, and the cast was armed with John's special pattern of blue-upright. He opened the fly-box, it was filled with

his favourite flies. The new keeper was clearly a man of worth!

Then he put on a pair of well-greased boots, buttoned up his gaiters, and went out into the morning.

Now those who know anything of the history of Devonshire will recollect the rhyming tradition that, ever since a Tracey assisted at the murder of Thomas à Becket,

“The Traceys
Always have the wind in their faces.”

The family records, which have been carefully kept for several hundred years, show that this ill-luck has been absolutely consistent, and that it has taken a certain set form. One Tracey will lose his money; the next will retrieve the family fortune and lose his wife at the birth of her first baby; the third will find that “his wife did become a well formed source of jealousy until he loosed her from him.”

John Tracey was not in the least superstitious; he was not even religious, unless one could call a fixed code of ethics combined with a strong sense of honour a religion; but, for the life of him, he could not help feeling that the Tracey luck was uncanny, and, though he did not definitely believe that the curse of Thomas of Canterbury could affect

him personally, he had so far avoided the thought of marriage. The fact that he was the last of a most unfortunate family had made him somewhat graver than most men of his age and circumstances.

But now there was no sadness in Tracey's face. It was a morning that made the mere act of living a physical pleasure, and John whistled softly to himself as he walked down-hill through the park, scuttling scores of nervous rabbits.

He ploughed on through the wet grass, leaving a clearly defined track behind him, until he reached the meadows beside the river: here, for all practical purposes, he might have been wading knee-deep. He climbed the tarred railings which separated the meadow from the road that led to Coombe Ottery and, standing on the bridge, inspected the pool below.

"Gin-clear," muttered Tracey, "and not a fish moving." The cold night had evidently killed off all the fly, and the day was not yet warm enough to hatch out a fresh rise; nevertheless, he mounted a red-palmer in place of the blue-upright, and proceeded to fish down-stream—for he was a Devonshire man, and understood the value of fishing down a quick stream with a well-hackled fly.

It was a glorious morning, but cold enough to

make motion a necessity; the mist was still clinging in wisps to the river; the grass was still ash-grey with the autumn dew; whilst the sun was preparing to rise and warm the air. But, although Tracey had a great love for Nature, he was far too keen a sportsman to notice anything except the work in hand, and he fished the stickle at the head of every pool, the broken water between the pools, and cast his fly well under either bank; but he fished on until he reached the boundary, without stirring a single fish. Then John Tracey sat down and lit his pipe.

Now, on a morning like this—when the black-birds were busy tapping for worms, the cattle browsing steadily in the meadows and the human stomach crying “cupboard!”—it was evident that the trout were feeding; in fact, they were so busy looking for worms and larvæ that they had no time to notice a chance palmer. So, after a minute’s thought, John pulled up a clod, found a couple of small pink worms amongst the grass roots, stripped the hackle off his fly, mounted the worms on the hook, and proceeded to fish up-stream. A man may do what he likes on his own water, and many consider clear-water worm fishing a fine art.

He had fished the first pool carefully; he had fished the babble which separated it from the next

pool; and then he commenced to fish what was certainly the best pool on the river, beginning at the stickle. Here the stream had taken a sharp bend, eating into the hillside until the far bank resembled a railway cutting: it was an ideal pool for a heavy fish.

He cast his worm lightly, it travelled halfway down the stickle and checked; after dropping the point of his rod for a few seconds, John struck and the reel shrieked. It might have been a five-pound, or even a seven-pound fish, and such trout are rare on the Otter.

And then, just as Tracey was fighting with all his skill, just as he had defeated one last frantic dash which would have brought the trout into his hover beneath the brushwood, there was a splash, and a half-grown spaniel puppy jumped off the bank and went for the swirl of the fish.

What happened, Tracey could never exactly tell: there was a strain on the line, a jerk, and—the trout was gone, and the hook was firmly fixed in the puppy's hind-quarters.

"Good Lord!" he muttered. He was far too much astonished to feel angry; and, besides, he found himself involved in a new problem.

First, he tried slacking out the line, whilst he

called the spaniel; but the puppy wanted to go home, and its home was on the other side of the river; it was perfectly obvious that he could not let the puppy land, snap the line, and run off with a yard of gut trailing behind it. Next, he tried playing the puppy as though it were a fish, giving it the butt and trusting to the force of the current to swing it round and land it below him; but the strain of the line on the puppy's hind-quarters destroyed its balance, and its head went under.

Tracey was almost at his wits' end, when he heard a faint "Oh!" and became conscious that there was a girl standing on the opposite bank.

"What are you doing?" she cried angrily; and, at the sound of her voice, the puppy made an extra violent struggle, lost its balance completely, and vanished.

"Oh! how cruel!" she cried; and, although she was on the other side of the river, he could hear her foot stamp. "Can't you see you're drowning my dog?"

Tracey ought to have felt relieved, for this young person was clearly Providence; he ought to have felt amused, for the situation had its absurdity; but he was only annoyed. "If you'll be kind enough to stop shrieking," he shouted back, "and go down

to the next bend, and call your—dog!” “Thanks!” he shouted, as the girl reached the bend. “Now call, whilst I slack the line!”

She stood at the end of the curve, where the river had thrown up a ridge of pebbles as it prepared to bend away in the opposite direction, and called the puppy—he unreeled gradually, so that the current should not catch hold of the slack of the line—and, after a gallant struggle, the puppy lay panting on the grass with the girl kneeling beside him.

Choosing the head of the stickle below the pool, where the water was shallow, Tracey waded over, reeling in the line as he went; then he knelt down to examine the wound.

“It isn’t very serious,” said he, taking out a pair of scissors in readiness. “If you’ll hold the patient quite still, I’ll operate”; and within two seconds, he had forced the point of the hook through the puppy’s skin, snipped off the barb, withdrawn the hook, and stood up to stretch himself.

CHAPTER II

BESIDE THE RIVER

“ I’M awfully sorry I was so rude,” said the girl, bending over the puppy. Tracey could see that the back of her neck was exceptionally pretty. “ I—I didn’t realise it was an accident.”

“ You thought I did it on purpose? ” he asked, laughing.

“ I thought it was—clumsiness,” she answered, and the back of her neck told him that she was blushing. “ But the way you did—everything—was so workmanlike—and—I’m awfully sorry! ”

“ If you’ll think a moment,” suggested Tracey, wishing that she would look up—for the back of her neck made him curious to see more—“ you’ll realise that I was much ruder: I told you to ‘ stop shrieking! ’ ”

“ So you did! ” she answered hopefully. “ Suppose we cry quits! ”—and the girl looked up.

Now there are three ways in which a girl can look at one, with endless variations: she can look straight at one, which is jolly; she can look down

at one, which is very jolly; or she can look up at one—and if the girl is disposed to be friendly, and if her eyes are almost purple, and if her cheeks are flushed, and if the sun has just risen and is playing hide-and-seek in her hair——

Tracey was prepared to find her one of those charmingly fresh country-bred girls who take their dogs for a swim before breakfast, and, judging from the nape of her neck, he had expected to find her pretty; but when his eyes met hers: “Suppose—we cry—quits,” said John Tracey awkwardly.

“But what happened?” asked she, without a trace of shyness. “When I came on the scene, you were fast in the spaniel, and—it must have looked awfully funny.”

“It must have looked awfully funny,” he repeated, metaphorically shaking himself until he had recovered his self-possession. “There was a fool of a man on one side of the river, fast in a half-drowned puppy, and wondering what on earth he could do; and there was a girl on the other side of the river, dancing about, and shrieking awful things.”

“I wasn’t dancing!” she answered with indignation.

“ Well—stamping. I could hear you stamp, right across the river! ”

“ And you promised to cry quits! ” said she, with her chin in the air. “ Then I’ll tell you what I saw! I’d lost my puppy—yes! I know he’s troublesome—and I found he’d disturbed some man who was fishing—and the man had thrown his fly across him, and hooked him, and was trying to drown him. Do you wonder I was angry? ”

“ I apologise! I apologise unreservedly! ” said Tracey. (The girl looked perfectly adorable in her mock anger, with her chin in the air.) “ I was a brute! After your apology, and after we’d cried quits——”

“ It wasn’t nice, was it? ” and she shook her head. “ But if you’re really sorry, and we’ve really cried quits, you might tell me what happened? ” The impropriety of talking together, without any sort of introduction, had not occurred to either of them.

“ I wish I knew what happened, ” answered Tracey.

“ But you must have some idea! ”

“ I’d fished down the stream without a rise; I’d substituted a worm for a fly, and was working my way back—— No! you needn’t look shocked! John

Tracey's my oldest friend, and I may poach if I like. Well, I'd hooked a trout—a thundering big trout, and before——”

“Was it a huge fish?”

“It was a huge fish!”

“Then you'd actually hooked Thomas?”

“Thomas?” Who in the name of wonder was “Thomas”?

“Oh! He's just the fish of the pool. They call him ‘Thomas’ because he suspects everyone, and everyone's been trying for him. But please go on!”

“I'd hooked Thomas, and he was fighting like a demon. There was a splash, and I was playing your puppy. That's all I know.”

“But what happened?” she persisted: she was feeling a little impatient with the man's unimaginative truthfulness. “The puppy couldn't have taken off the trout and hooked himself!”

“Of course it might have been the nymph——” he suggested.

The girl gave a delightful, hopeless little shrug of her shoulders: now he was getting too imaginative!

“Then,” said he wearily, “since you'll neither have fact nor fiction, let us try to reconstruct the

crime: your puppy sees something moving in the river—something that might be some new kind of water-rabbit—so he jumps in to investigate; the current carries him against the line, which gives a new direction to the pull of the line; the trout, having been lightly hooked, breaks away; the hook springs back and buries itself in the puppy. It sounds simple.”

“Then—my dog ruined everything!” cried the girl with real distress. “Oh! I’m so sorry!”

Tracey wanted to say that he was not sorry; he wanted to tell her that he blessed the trout and the puppy (and even the worm) for bringing about their acquaintance; but he wisely contented himself with pointing out that he had been provided with a new object in life—the capture of Thomas. “See!” he whispered; a large fish had risen upstream in the middle of a deep and very still pool. “If you keep it a secret, we’ll poach that trout!”

He caught a couple of daddy-long-legs on the grass, placed them on his hook, and, crawling along behind the alders, cast directly over the rising fish. There was a swirl; and it was a case of “Pull man! Pull pounder!”

“Prithee! ’Tis a lusty trout!” quoth Tracey.

“The like of which will make wholesome eating,”

answered the girl, taking up her cue without a moment's hesitation, "provided you can succeed in vanquishing this monster."

"Such fish are but seldom to be met with, and are only to be conquered by skill and patience. Mark how he struggles!"

"'Tis a noble fight, master! And now you have him at your mercy!" She slipped the landing-net from his creel-strap, and sank it in the water.

"Now, I pray you raise him gently." John had manœuvred his fish above the landing-net. "Any undue haste might make this monster struggle."

"Gracious!" cried the girl as the trout nearly jumped out of the landing-net, and she flung him quite ten yards inland, smashing the cast.

"That last 'Gracious!' rather spoilt the dialogue!" laughed Tracey; "but where did you learn to talk like Izaak Walton?"

"I have a father, kind sir," answered she, "who hath an infirmity of the eyesight; and I read him the gentle art of Master Walton, as well as other of the English Classics. I am no simple maid, but a cultivated person."

He did not trust himself to look at the girl—his eyes might have said more than it was wise to say—so he busied himself with wrapping the fish in

grass and rushes, and in binding the parcel together with a yard and a half of fishing line. "This trout, stewed with thyme and verjuice, will make you a toothsome breakfast," said he. "I'm afraid I don't quite know what 'verjuice' is, but it sounds as if it ought to be in the dialogue." He did not ask her to accept the fish—he just gave it; for game that has been killed and flowers that have been plucked are the two things that anyone may give to anyone, without either taking a liberty or running the chance of a refusal. Then he went down to the river and washed his hands, and fumbled in vain for his pocket-handkerchief; the girl smiled and handed him hers—it smelt of lavender.

"You will join us, master?" said she. "We live hard by, and we shall, I warrant you, make a good, honest, wholesome hungry breakfast. Besides," she added, "my father will want to thank you for saving the puppy. It's a very valuable puppy!"

"I seem to know the breed," said Tracey.

"It's one of the Tracey spaniels. Mr. Tracey's keeper gave it me. Allow me to introduce you to Peter Tracey." She turned her head and whispered: "He likes to be called by his family name; he's a very particular puppy!"

He hid a smile, for although the Tracey spaniels

were all called by names which began with a "P"—such as "Pluto," "Placid"—the name "Peter" was reserved (on account of some obscure joke) for the Tracey peacocks. "How are you feeling now, Peter?" inquired Tracey. "Better?" The puppy held up one paw, which John shook gravely.

"How strange!" said the girl, eyeing John. "All the Tracey spaniels are said to hold up a paw when a Tracey speaks to them—at least, so the keeper told me: Peter's never done it before." Then she drew her bow at a venture: "Won't you come back to breakfast, Mr. Tracey? I'm sure my father would like to thank you."

"Mayn't I call later in the day?" asked he, looking down at his wet breeches with their knees stained by the red Devon earth.

"Oh! how thoughtless of me!" she cried impulsively. "Please go home and change at once!" Then she grew a little shy and she felt her cheeks flushing—not because the man was Tracey of Tracey, but because the indefinite fisherman of the September morning had materialised into a real person with a postal address and a parliamentary vote. "Good-bye, Mr. Tracey," she said, holding out her hand. "We live at Coombe Lodge—we're your

tenants, you know. I'll tell my father to expect you."

He took her hand and, before either he or she realised what he was doing, he had kissed it.

"Oh!" cried the girl.

"I've been abroad for so long," said he diplomatically. As a matter of fact, he had been in Japan, where hand-kissing is not the fashion, and this had been a sudden impulse.

So he went his way, and she went hers; and the image of the girl remained before Tracey's eyes.

As for the girl, she rubbed her hand in the dew and wiped it on her dress, for she could not find her handkerchief; but, although she was engaged secretly to a man in the infantry, and the touch of Tracey's lips ought to have disappeared, the kiss was still there.

CHAPTER III

JOHN TRACEY

“The Traceys
Always have the wind in their faces.”

Now the subject of a family curse, with its hereditary bad luck, cannot be dismissed as an absurdity any more than it can be accepted without question; for there are authentic cases amongst some of the older county families of a run of ill-fortune descending, from father to son, through many successive generations.

The case of family portents and death warnings is quite a different matter, since the fact that a dog howled outside a house—or an owl hooted, or a bird beat its wings against the window, or a tree fell in the park—at the time of a death may be merely a strange coincidence. Besides, dogs howl, owls hoot, and trees fall without anything serious happening; it is only when a “portent” chances to coincide with a death that it is remembered; unfruitful “portents” are forgotten within a week.

But when we come to the curse which is said to

have descended on the Traceys through their murder of Thomas à Becket, we find something that cannot be explained away by any theory of coincidence.

This curse appears to have taken effect from the date of the Canterbury murder, and the curse seems to have fallen in an unbroken sequence of infidelity, ruin and bereavement. To instance the three previous generations: John's great-grandfather put away his wife "for just cause—so much as Holy Church doth permit"; John's grandfather ruined himself, partly through some speculation, partly by importing Italian marble to build the present mansion; John's father made a fortune in America and married a gentle and graceful wife, only to lose his bride some ten months after their marriage, and three weeks after John was born. Turn over "The Book of the Traceys"—it is kept in the third shelf from the ground, close to the library door—and you will find a record sequence of misfortune that has gone back for centuries.

There is no actual record of how the curse fell, or if St. Thomas himself cursed his murderer; in fact, a beautiful prayer in Dame Jane Tracey's Day Book, penned about 1735, which asks St. Thomas to pray that "our temporal tribulations may lead to our eternal glorie," seems to assume that the

curse was simply the result of the act. Of course "The Book of the Traceys" may not be authentic—manuscripts have been forged before now—but the sequence of misfortune can be traced from other documents, for at least a hundred-and-twenty years, and the ill-luck of the family is proverbial.

But the acknowledgment of the historical truth of the Tracey misfortunes is not an acknowledgment that they were the result of a curse: as Christians, we must deny the justice of one man (or one act) being able to curse unborn generations; as reasonable persons, we must protest that such a curse would be unreasonable.

If the Traceys had misappropriated church property or stolen land that belonged to the poor, the sin would have remained in the family until restitution had been made, and the curse of Heaven might well have rested on any member of the family who knowingly enjoyed the fruits of the plunder; but the modern Traceys are no more responsible for the crime of the original Tracey, than our gracious king is responsible for the hasty words by which his ancestor incited the crime.

But (*a*) can we deny the power of hereditary temperament? (*b*) Can we deny the overwhelming influence of a fixed belief? I do not think so! For

experience teaches us that when a strong man resolves to succeed, the chances are that he will do so; and if he should doggedly expect misfortune, trouble-hunting is the most certain of all sports.

Thus, the Tracey who lost his money through speculation might have stopped building Tracey, let the property, and moved into a smaller house; but he seems to have muttered "Kismet!" mortgaged the estate, and continued the expenditure. The Tracey who put away his wife, expected infidelity; and to suspect a woman, without cause, is the surest way to drive her into unfaithfulness; besides, poor Mrs. Tracey seems to have had no chance to vindicate her character; she was quietly "put away so much as Holy Church doth permit," without any form of trial.

The case of the wives who died after child-birth is less easy to understand; but, in the case of John's mother, a delicate yet healthy woman was simply saturated with the idea that she would die in child-bed, and the exclusion of every breath of air from her bedroom (and similar "precautions") would be enough to kill a far stronger woman.

Taking one thing with another, the Tracey curse seems to have been the result of a fixed belief, held by a race that was strong to the verge of obstinacy.

The practical result of misfortune, acting on the Tracey character, was remarkable. It produced fatalism, but it was a Christian fatalism—*Memoria Pii aeterna!* There was an obstinate adherence to the old religion, an obstinate loyalty, an unswerving devotion to honour and an overwhelming sense of duty in every Tracey, even the most unfortunate. They were hard men, these Traceys, severe and somewhat lacking in charity, but they were very self-sacrificing and very just.

When Mrs. Tracey died, John's father devoted himself to the improvement of his estate, the welfare of his tenants and, above all, to the practice of his religion: Tracey became more like a monastery than a private residence, and it was not a good place in which to bring up a sensitive and somewhat imaginative boy.

From his earliest recollection, John was expected to attend daily Mass (which he liked), to be present at English Prayers before Mass (which wearied him), and to spend one solid evening hour over Night Prayers, Litanies and Penitential Psalms (which tired him to death). Again, long walks with an austere and reserved man, only enlivened by admonitions on the duty of facing inevitable trouble with a firm courage and a strict adherence to the

path of rectitude, were depressing. Again, a training which taught piety, fortitude and self-sacrifice, whilst it left out sympathy and charity, sapped the very foundations of his belief. So, when at the age of twenty-four John quietly told his father that he had ceased to believe in the Catholic religion, he was deserving of pity rather than censure.

There was no quarrel, there were no recriminations; John was told to leave Tracey until after his father's death; and, although he met his father once or twice in town, he remained away from Devonshire until he succeeded to the estate.

So when Tracey drifted to Japan, he found a people and a religion which were intensely sympathetic to him. *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* might have been the motto of the Traceys, but they would have died through a dogged sense of duty. "It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country" is the motto of Japan, and the Japanese soldier goes to death, braced by the smiles of his sweetheart and his own interior happiness. This is the visible expression of Shinto, which first attracted Tracey.

Then he discovered that "the Way of the Gods," which is now termed Shinto, taught something more; and that the sweetness, courtesy and

unselfishness, which distinguish the Japanese, are part and parcel of their religion. This was a revelation!

Finally, he found that the hereditary principles, in which he had been brought up, were the essentials of Shinto; but here there was no unswerving legacy of misfortune, no mechanical curse—everything was alive. First, so he learnt, there is the hereditary disposition—and it behoves each man to mould a good disposition for his heirs to inherit. Next, there are the spirits of good ancestors whispering good and wise suggestions, and the spirits of evil ancestors whispering unworthy suggestions. Last, there is the man's conscience, which will enable him to accept the good and reject the evil, with perfect rightness.

I do not mean that Tracey became a Shintoist, or that he ceased to be an Agnostic, but rather that his European ideas of individualism became shrouded; he was not a John Tracey with duties to self, but a John Tracey with duties to those dependent on him. And yet, he remained a Tracey who was severely English.

However, a truce to moralising!

CHAPTER IV

BREAKFAST

LUNCH in the balcony of the Cecil, with the Thames sweeping along outside and the band playing so softly that it does not hinder conversation, is a luxurious meal; so is dinner at Prince's: for in both these restaurants there is plenty of room and plenty of air.

Now the dining-room at Tracey had been cleverly planned; it could dine thirty without crowding, or seat one without giving that sensation of loneliness which is so often felt in big rooms; also, the art of breakfasting was part and parcel of the Tracey traditions. So, when Tracey had bathed in water heated to 115° F. and dried himself by an open window after the Japanese method, he put on a suit of soft flannels and came down to find a breakfast that ought to have rejoiced his heart.

The September of 1908 was glorious, and the morning had by now grown warm enough to allow the table to be placed by the open windows; the fresh air carried in the smell of stephanotis and

mingled it with the scent from the rose-bowl which stood in the centre of the table.

Then, as to the breakfast itself—it was that supreme meal, a country breakfast. Everything was home-grown, from the bacon and ham which were smoked over a green oak fire up at the farm, to the bread which was made from wheat grown on the estate and ground at the mill down by the Otter; the grapes came from the Tracey vinery, the peaches had ripened in the old walled garden; the pears were warm from the sun, the milk was warm from the cow, and John's heart was warm from the girl by the river. In fact, it was a breakfast that would tempt an Englishman to fill himself, so that he might fish or shoot or work until it was time for eight o'clock dinner. When food-reformers realise that the English climate calls for a hearty breakfast, and devote themselves to the simplification of lunch, they may do some good.

John Tracey entered the dining-room through one door, as the footman brought in the warm dishes through the other. He seated himself at the table and, turning over his post aimlessly, rearranged the letters in a neat pile beside his plate. He opened the *Daily Mail*—the other London papers would come by a later train—glanced at the headings and,

dropping the paper beside him, helped himself to some trout.

What a perfectly delightful girl that was, thought he, and yet how confoundedly elusive. He could see her standing with the sun behind her, and her hair like spun sunshine, but he could not recall her features. He could remember the pose of her figure, and he could remember the exact word that expressed it—lithesome—but he could not remember if she were short or tall. He could not remember the colour of her eyes, but he could remember the tone of her voice; there was a certain fulness about it that haunted him, and yet it was not a deep voice—it was a voice that suggested colour—"blending the purple of the iris with the sparkle of the dew-drop," as the Japanese poem describes such a voice. That gave him the key to her eyes—they combined the purple of the iris with the sparkle of the dew-drop. "Of course she was only a pleasant memory and he did not want to meet her again," thought he. "Thank Heaven she lived at Coombe Lodge, which was less than a mile from Tracey," thought he—which two thoughts appear contradictory.

Then he took out a small, crumpled handkerchief from his pocket and unfolded it. Mind! Tracey was a perfectly normal Englishman of thirty-five,

not in the least given to sentiment, and he was acting simply from impulse, without conscious volition. He examined the handkerchief; there was a hole in one corner of the lace, and it smelt of lavender; it was marked "B.S." "I wonder what the initials stand for," thought Tracey. He did not attempt the surname, but he found the first initial interesting. "Beatrice?" thought John. "No! the girl could never have grown like that if she'd been called Beatrice." "Blanche?" "No!" "Betty?" "I'll swear she's called Betty!" He emptied his teacup.

"I love my love with a 'B,' because she's beautiful," he mused, unconsciously playing the game that Mr. Pepys writes of in his diary.

"I hate her, because she bewilders me."

"I took her to the sign of the Blue-upright."

"And fed her on—what did I feed her on?—I fed her on Beautiful Things."

"And her name is Betty."

Then he realised his folly, and muttered "Damn!"

The door opened noiselessly and the butler brought in a fresh rack of toast. John crushed the handkerchief up his coat sleeve.

"I hope you are enjoying your breakfast, sir?" inquired the butler anxiously. "There, sir, you've

touched nothing but trout, and fish is but poor trade at best. Shall I cut you a slice of bird, Master John? Cold partridge always was your fancy."

"But it's only the second, Gill," protested Tracey. "The birds won't be eatable."

"Knowing that you were coming home, sir," suggested the butler gravely, "Weymouth may have acted a trifle previous. I think you'll find the birds satisfactory, Master John"; and, without more ado, Gill cut off the breast and wing from one of the partridges and placed them before his master.

"Who's taken Coombe Lodge?" inquired Tracey, casually.

"A Colonel Standish, sir."

"A bachelor?" asked John.

"No, sir. A widower with one young lady. They came just before the master died." And Gill crossed himself devoutly, as his lips articulated the prayer for the dead.

There was silence for a time, the old butler standing still behind Tracey's chair; for he had carried John a-pick-a-back when he was a child, and he felt loath to leave the room. There is no friendship that is more sincere than the friendship between an old family servant and his comparatively young master.

"Is Colonel Standish much of a sportsman, Gill?" asked Tracey presently, returning obliquely to the subject of interest.

"Too rheumatically, sir, to do more than potter about with a gun. But Miss Betty——"

"Then her name is Betty," thought John.

"Miss Betty is a wonderful shot at a pigeon—at least so Weymouth says. Not that she's one of those suffragettes, Master John—I don't hold with no suffragettes—but she's a wonderful shot for a lady."

"I met a lady down by the river, this morning," began John, casting about for the exact amount to tell. "She'd a spaniel pup with her—it looked like one of our dogs—and I managed to get it hitched up in my line. I'd some difficulty in loosening it."

"That would be her, sir. And I'll be bound she thanked you prettily, Master John?"

Tracey grinned to himself.

"Miss Betty has the right word for everybody," continued Gill; "and a kind word for everybody. She's wonderfully well liked."

Again there was silence, whilst Gill added another slice of partridge to his master's breakfast. So this girl was popular from Gill's standpoint,

thought John; and the standpoint of an old family servant is a very high one.

“Speaking of pigeons,” said John; “are there many this year?”

“A perfect plague, sir.”

“Then I’d better shoot some this evening, and give the partridges a chance.” He paused a moment and added, as if by a happy afterthought, “I might ask up Colonel and Miss Standish.”

“Yes, sir,” answered the butler, fetching a paper-knife from the mantelpiece, and placing it beside the unopened letters.

Gill smiled quietly to himself as he closed the door. His one innocent pride lay in the fact that he was an old English Catholic, and no convert; his one harmless vanity displayed itself in a knowledge of Latin with the true old English accent; and he muttered to himself something which sounded like “Veney, veedey, veesey.” Of a truth, it is hopeless to try and keep one’s thoughts hidden from an old servant.

Tracey opened the first letter on the pile, and read:

“DEAR SIR,—I have studied your two articles which appeared in *The Quarterly Review*, with great interest. If you contemplate writing a book

on the same subject, we should be pleased to act as your publishers.

"If I may venture to say so, your standpoint is admirable. We have had several books by Englishmen and Americans who embraced the Japanese mode of life; a book, written by an Englishman who retained his nationality, whilst he sympathised with the spirit of the East, should prove invaluable.

"In your articles, you refer to the influence of Buddhism on the art and character of the race; if you could show this influence by the reproduction of paintings and engravings, the book would gain an additional value.

"Yours faithfully,"

the name of an eminent publisher was appended.

"By Jove!" said John Tracey; and the vision of Betty Standish vanished. For woman and ambition cannot reign together unless the woman associates herself with the ambition—in which case, the two units combine to make a Force.

It was a fascinating idea, this "Japanese Character by an Englishman"; and Tracey knew that he had seen Japan as few Europeans have ever seen it. As the publisher had pointed out, there are many Westerns who have adopted Eastern customs—dressed up in Japanese clothes, consumed their tea and *sake* by the thimbleful, smoked pinches of

scentless tobacco, and slept on wooden pillows; but, with the exception of Lafcadio Hearn who married into the samurai class, these people have only succeeded in denationalising themselves, without winning the respect of the Japanese. Tracey, on the other hand, had gone out with excellent introductions, and had mixed with the Japanese upper class, whilst he remained an English gentleman. He had seen Japan as a guest, friend, and student, and not through dressing up and mixing with the lower classes.

Paintings? Engravings? How thankful he was that his courteous old Japanese professor had taught him to buy as a student, and not as a collector. It was a great idea, if only he had the skill to write the book.

He turned over his letters, and selected one that was addressed in a very familiar handwriting:

“DEAR OLD CHAP,” (he read), “I forgot to tell you the other night that my late C.O. has settled close to Tracey. He is a real good sort and, although he used to be well off, he seems to have lost most of his money, so you might give him a day’s shooting now and then.

“Remember me to Col. Standish, and give my best love to little Betty. Tell her that I still have

Punch, though he is getting past polo and I can only use him when I umpire.

"I hope to get down towards the end of October. The coverts won't be bare enough for shooting before.

"Yours,

"ST. J. POSTLETHWAITE."

Then Postlethwaite knew this girl! Of course, she must have been the kiddie he used to write about. She must have been the child that was photographed on Postle's pony, holding his puppies, or sitting on his knee; in fact, his despatch-box must contain at least half a dozen photographs of Postle with Betty. He wished he had unpacked his despatch-box. And so John's thoughts returned to woman, and ambition sank into its proper place in the scale of creation.

His meeting with this girl had been like a scene in a theatre. His first vivid impression of the play had been received as he stood beside her, and she looked up at him. The trout, the dog, the stamping of her foot had been the overture: the play had really commenced when he waded across the river, and she looked up at him; it was comedy, light comedy, with an absurd situation in the first scene, during which he caught a property trout, and she

talked like Izaak Walton. What a sympathetic little artist he had to act with!

He wondered where the next scene would be staged. Perhaps on the lawn at Coombe Lodge, when he called to be thanked for saving the life of that absurd puppy. He must be very careful not to allow the situation to carry him away, and land him in a serious drama; for he did not pretend to himself that he was blind to the attractions of Miss Betty Standish.

Yes! A comedy played between a man of thirty-five and a girl of about twenty was all very well; but if he was not on his guard, this pretty comedy might easily develop into a serious tragedy for John Tracey. Then, what with the memory of the sunny water-meadows and the scent of the stephanotis coming in through the window, his imagination drifted on until he could almost picture this girl walking into the sunshine on the terrace—and what a perfect stage the terrace would make!

There was a rustle outside the window and a “thrum,” just as though an energetic lady had opened a particularly large fan; one of the Tracey peacocks was strutting on the portico, with his tail at attention. Tracey laughed at this opening of the second scene.

"Morning, Peter!" said John. "Enjoying the sunshine?"

"Squark!" answered Peter; and forthwith the bird began to sidle to and fro, keeping the painted side of his fan as much as possible towards the window.

"Want some buttered toast, Peter?"

"Squark!" answered the peacock; and, when he had finished the fragments of toast that John placed on the window-sill, Peter sang his grace in a raucous voice.

"Do you wish to see Weymouth, sir?" Gill was standing beside him, handing a cup of black coffee. It was really extraordinary that the fat old butler could move so silently!

"I had planned a comedy, Gill," said John; "and you have turned it into a pantomime—you and Peter, between you—the transformation scene of a pantomime. *Quem deus perdere vult, prius dementat*—that's Latin, Gill"; and he smiled at the old servant.

"Whomsoever God wills to perish," began Gill solemnly; then he hesitated and looked puzzled. "I don't seem to remember the text, Master John; it doesn't sound like Scripture!"

"It doesn't, Gill; it only means that I

mustn't be an idiot. Give me a cigarette. Who's Weymouth?"

"He's the new keeper, sir, and——" Gill's face assumed a look of deep cunning—"and, I think you'll find him another transformation scene, Master John."

"Steady, Gill! Leave me some illusions! Don't change the transformation scene into a harlequinade! Do you remember taking me to the pantomime at Exeter, when I wanted to bring home some of the little fairies to play with and you said that the Master wouldn't approve?"

"Yes, sir!" answered Gill, smiling reminiscently.

"And you told me that the fairies were only dirty little girls who danced round barrel-organs when they were off duty: that is life. Tell Weymouth to meet me at the kennels presently. I haven't seen the dogs yet."

"Heigh-ho!" sighed John, as he stepped out through the window. "So crumble our fairy castles!"

Outside, down by the river, the sun was licking up the last shreds of the mist, robbing the theatre of its morning poetry before it started to paint the next scene with the flicker of sunlight and shadow.

The day had become as uninteresting as an empty theatre; Peter was transformed into a vulgar, strutting fowl; John had become a squire who had to see his keeper, then his steward.

Thoughts of his cottage on the side of Lake Biwa came into his mind—of his garden overhanging the lake, from which he could watch the wild-fowl silhouette themselves against the sunset, until they vanished into the shadow of the hills opposite. When he had first bought the cottage, he had taken the Japanese sage's advice and planted "fruit trees in large numbers, especially the orange and the lime," and now they would be in full bearing. "When the fruit has formed and ripened," argues the sage, "it is not less beautiful than the flowers." Again, the maples beside the little summer-house would be red with autumn colouring; below them, beside the small waterfall which churned down towards the lake, there were willows, cherry trees, and firs: he had not planted the trees too thickly because such an error "makes much moisture, and in summer harbours mosquitoes, which are a plague." His eye rested on a wisp of mist, which is the image of wandering thoughts, and forms the "cushion-word" (or foundation) of a Japanese poem:

“Pale grey morning-mist
Clouds all my exiled dreaming—
Would I could see thee,
Maple, beside my roof-tree
Clothed in thy red kimono.”

How he wished he were back in Japan, where life and scenery were a real drama, and no morning illusion. Then a small piece of cambric dropped out of his sleeve and fell at his feet.

Tracey picked up the handkerchief in an instant; he held it in his hand for some forty seconds; he crumpled it into his waistcoat pocket, and went indoors with all his morning vapours gone.

“Tell some one to tell the keeper that I’ll see him after lunch,” said Tracey to a passing housemaid.

He put on his panama, caught up a stick and went out quickly.

CHAPTER V

CONCERNING LOVE AND A LACE HANDKERCHIEF

SIR OLIVER LODGE seems to have proved that all matter—man, woman, or lump of coal—is formed of minute particles of electricity whirling round at an incredible rate of speed. Orientals seem to consider that man is positive and woman negative. I. Therefore, putting two and two together, and after the usual practice making six, we may conclude that love is some form of electricity, and that masculine love is amo-positive and feminine love amo-negative. Since we are ingenious persons, we may appropriate the ordinary sex-marks (σ masculine, and $\wp$ feminine) to suit our purpose, and we get σ as the sign of the masculine amo-positive affection, and $\wp$ as the sign of the feminine amo-negative affection.

As everyone knows—or pretends to know—there are two kinds of electricity, positive and negative,* and these two kinds are eternally striving to balance

* Lest it should appear to the student of amo-electrobiology that I am confusing static and magnetic electricity, I must point out that the lines of force in each type are not dissimilar; besides, amo-electricity is neither magnetic nor static, but ecstatic.—A. J. A.

and satisfy each other. The clouds are charged with positive electricity, the earth with negative electricity; both sky and earth are unhappy, and incidentally give us headaches. There is a crash! the positive current rushes from sky to earth, the negative from earth to sky: we see a flash of lightning, and both clouds and earth are for the moment satisfied. But the clouds and earth are perpetually creating and discharging a fresh supply.

It is exactly the same with male and female. The man is perpetually creating ♂, and the woman is perpetually creating ♀. These forces—♂ and ♀—are perpetually craving to balance and satisfy each other, not of necessity by the actual contact of a kiss or hand-touch, but through the light-waves of a glance, the sound-waves of a word, or the mere presence of two lovers in the same room.

But notice this: every man has ♂, and every woman has ♀, but any man does not fall in love with any woman. The reason of this is simple, and yet difficult to explain. If one presses down the loud pedal of a piano and sings A natural, A natural will sound whilst the other strings remain dumb: the receiver in a Marconi station is tuned to one wave-current, and ignores all other electric waves—at least in theory. So in each man, the ♂ is tuned

to a certain pitch, and it is only when it finds a ♀ tuned to a similar pitch that it yearns to balance and satisfy: in ordinary language, it is only then that the man and woman fall in love.

And notice this: marriage may be the crown of true love, but true love will stand the strain of a lifelong engagement, and engaged persons who truly love each other may be trusted together to any extent. Once give ♂ and ♀ that are in tune, and although the electricity grows more feeble as the couple grow older, the currents remain in tune, and love is constant. Passion quickly tires, love never tires and never becomes satiated.

The Giorgione Venus at Dresden, the Botticelli Venus at Berlin, and the Velasquez Venus in the National Gallery are perfect types of beauty, and there are living women who are quite as beautiful, and yet men do not fall in love with this beauty wholesale; but, each man who is fortunate enough to find his perfect amo-negative (even though the world may judge her to be inferior to the aforesaid types of beauty) prefers her to all others, and the pair are absolutely in love with each other until they die.

There are probably hundreds of thousands of different electro-amative wave-lengths, and perfect

harmony must be rare; but even a marriage of convenience may produce sufficient harmony to make married life fairly happy. When ♂ and ♀ are in perfect harmony, and each is the exact complement of the other, the response is immediate and we have love-at-first-sight.

We may have added our two and two together and made, not six, but a full dozen; and yet, since we have been clever enough to account for love (which is a triumph) and to account for love-at-first-sight (which is an achievement), we may be forgiven.

II. Take a second argument. A girl of twenty has her natural disposition written on her features—sweet mouth and saucy nose for Miss Sunshine, turned-down mouth and long nose for Miss Dol-drums. She has spent twenty years in smiling and sulking, and so on, therefore she has spent twenty years in developing her facial muscles into an habitual expression. Both natural disposition and formed character are stamped on her face.

If a grown man cannot judge a girl's disposition and character at first sight, he had best ask his aunt to choose a wife for him. In short, it is the strong man who falls in love with the right girl straight away; whilst it is the cautious idiot who hesitates, yields to flattery, is beguiled and marries a minx.

III. In passing, it is interesting to notice that lace handkerchiefs, and such gear, are formed of "matter," and that all matter is composed of revolving electrons; and, although inanimate matter cannot become the source of amative energy, it may become a sort of storage battery (just like the accumulator that stores the electricity in your motor) and store up the ♀. If (as some Japanese believe) a doll which has been loved by many generations of children may store up love; if (as an Eminent English Scientist has declared) this is not incompatible with the theories of modern science; then, surely, a lace handkerchief may become stored with sufficient ♀ to make a man with the corresponding ♂ value it above all his other earthly possessions.

IV. Finally, if you, my dear sir, have lived in the world for five-and-thirty years, and still do not believe in love-at-first-sight, you are what Mr. Roscoe would have called a "damned sugar plum," and I have nothing more to say to you!

John Tracey knew nothing of all this. He was a man who learnt from actual experience, picking up his knowledge first hand; and, since he had never been seriously in love, he was ignorant of love. He wanted to see this girl again, and therefore he deter-

mined to pay a morning call; he wanted to keep her handkerchief, and he meant to do so.

So, taking his stick and panama, he crossed the park, passed over the Otter by the foot-bridge which is just above the Grammar School bathing-place in the mill-dam, and followed the footpath to Coombe Ottery. All this was simple, and it was equally easy to buy a handkerchief of old Honiton lace at the Misses Crewys' shop in the High Street and to take the road towards Coombe Lodge; but as he neared Coombe Lodge, Tracey began to slacken his pace, for he found himself in an unexpected difficulty.

It was very well to say that he had found Miss Standish's handkerchief in his pocket and that, as he had managed to tear the lace border, he had ventured to bring her a new one; but how could he ask her to accept such an evidently valuable piece of old Honiton, and how could he account for its purchase? He stood still and pondered. Then his face cleared, and he went back to Tracey.

Later on in the day, the housekeeper found that the door of the large bedroom was open, and that the wardrobe of the late Mrs. Tracey was in some confusion. From this external evidence she deduced that none of the housemaids had been prying, and wondered what Mr. Tracey could have been seeking.

CHAPTER VI

A MORNING CALL

As John Tracey turned into the shade of Coombe Lodge drive, Betty came round the corner of the house; and when he saw her, he knew that he loved her.

For it was just as though he felt a great longing, and his inner self—that is to say the real part of him—seemed to go out and meet her. He did not formulate any thoughts, but in an instant he realised that she was everything to him, and that she would always be everything to him. Her face did not matter, her figure did not matter, nothing mattered; he did not even notice that the sun was making her hair shimmer: she was Betty, and that was enough.

Now very great love always means a reciprocity. The girl may presently grow to love the man because he first loved her; but he would never have first loved her, if she had not the capacity and inclination to love him back: it is only in legends that hearts are lost to statues or ice maidens. So, since

there was a reciprocity, John felt a great calm and a great self-assurance.

“ Good-morning, Miss Standish,” said he, raising his hat and speaking as though she were only an ordinary girl, instead of Betty. “ How’s the invalid? ”

“ He’s doing nicely, Mr. Tracey,” said she, feeling absurdly happy, although she did not know why. “ He’s been helping me to weed; he’s been gardening on his own account; and now I fancy he’s gone off to chase the chickens. He’s a most troublesome puppy! ” Then she raised her voice and called: “ Peter! ”

The summer had tanned the girl’s face, just as it tans the complexions of fair Italians, until her hair and cheeks seemed to have been wrought out of different shades of the same colour; then, lest there should be monotony, the southern blood had tinged her cheeks and painted her lips redder than those of ordinary Englishwomen. Though John did not love her because of her beauty (he would not have loved her a scrap less if she had been then and there permanently disfigured) he was beginning to feel that her looks became her like pearls round the neck of a pretty woman, or daisies amongst meadow-grass. He inquired if Peter were really

troublesome, not because the topic interested him, but because it was the natural question to ask.

"Troublesome?" she retorted. "Look at my hair! And I consider that you're responsible: he's one of the Tracey dogs, you know."

"Yes!" he answered, inspecting her critically. "Your hair is looking rather faded, but I shouldn't worry if I were you; try peroxide; you'll get the golden tint back in no time. Of course, if you really think that I'm responsible, I'll order the stuff for you—it's the least I can do. What's the matter with Peter?"

She knew that she had unintentionally laid herself open to a compliment and was grateful to him for not taking advantage. "It isn't that Peter's exactly disobedient," she explained. "He's awfully fond of me, and all that; but he treats me like a younger sister. He patronises me."

"I see," laughed Tracey.

"Now, this morning," continued she, "I was weeding, and Peter came to help me. He grubbed up one daisy; then he wrinkled his nose and looked up at me and said, as plainly as a dog can speak: 'I'll show you how it ought to be done'; and before I could stop him, he had dug up half a dozen geraniums."

“And then——?” inquired John. It was a strange experience to have to join in a frivolous conversation about an absurd dog, whilst his heart was saying the most serious things it could say; and yet he was enjoying himself, and answering more or less naturally.

“Of course I scolded him,” went on Betty. “I threw a regular parade rasp into my voice and scolded him awfully; but he only grinned, and turned up his nose”—she tilted hers to an angle of some sixty degrees—“and said: ‘That’s right, little Betty! Go on with your weeding, it’s girl’s work; I must attend to the poultry.’ At any rate, he trotted off towards the fowls’-house. You’re not believing me, Mr. Tracey!”

“He actually had the impudence to call you ‘Betty’?”

“He always does,” said she sadly. “You see, he thinks he’s a Tracey of Tracey, and I’m only the girl at Coombe Lodge. It’s his way of keeping me in my place. But you’re not believing me, Mr. Tracey!”

“I should believe anything you told me,” he answered truthfully. Some truths may be told with safety; they sound so like polite exaggerations.

“Then I’ll show you how I’m treated!” She

raised her voice and called: "Peter! Peter! You bad dog! Come here at once!" No Peter appeared.

"Now watch!" Her voice softened, and she called: "Peter! Peter! Come here, dear! I'm sorry I spoke so roughly. I want you to help me." And almost before she had done calling, Peter hurried out of the laurels and flung himself on his mistress, mud and all.

"Well! I'm—I'm blessed!" exclaimed John, as the small dog turned to him, and gravely held up one paw.

"Isn't it exactly what I told you?" cried the girl. "He despises me, just as much as he respects you! I'm his social inferior! Couldn't you use your influence, Mr. Tracey? Make him behave himself! Please do!" Her voice was almost pathetic.

"Little dogs must do what they're told," said John, stooping over the spaniel. "Miss Standish is your mistress, and you must obey her, Peter. She is a lady, and you must look after her and take care of her."

"Steady!" protested Betty, anxiously, "or he won't let me call my soul my own."

"Always remembering to be humble and obedient," added the man. The little spaniel looked so wise and intelligent, that Betty took heart.

"Thank you ever so much, Mr. Tracey," she

said hopefully. "I'm sure he'll obey me now." Then she turned to the dog and began gently: "Go to bed, Peter!" Her tone grew firmer: "Go to bed, sir! Go to bed, you disgraceful puppy! Oh! Mr. Tracey, do make him behave!"

"Go to bed!" ordered John, without raising his voice; and Peter went.

Their eyes met, and Betty laughed softly. "Isn't it absurd," she said; "you know, when I talk about Peter like that, I really half believe it. He's an uncanny puppy."

"What would life be without pretend? Now I——" and it dawned on Tracey that this was an ideal opening to introduce the object of his visit; so he suggested that the sun was very hot, that he had walked to Coombe Ottery and back since breakfast, and that the seat under the shade of the horse-chestnut beside the house looked inviting."

"I have a confession to make," said Tracey, seating himself and taking off his panama.

"How exciting!" she answered, leaning back and clasping her hands behind her neck. One sunbeam slipped through the chestnut leaves and flicked gold-dust out of her hair; another crept through and kissed her arm where the loose sleeve had fallen back; altogether she looked bewitchingly saucy.

"An Oriental Mystery: The Confession of a Returned Heir. Please go on, Mr. Tracey."

"You remember lending me your handkerchief, this morning, Miss Standish?"

"Yes," answered Betty, wondering what was coming.

"I stole it."

The girl felt a wretched thrill of disappointment. She had found John so companionable and so trustable, and she liked him so much; and now he was going to spoil it all by trying to flirt. Although she was too sensible to attach much importance to his kissing her hand by the river, she had not forgotten the incident; and, as an engaged girl, she had no intention of being led into a flirtation. She did not change her position or move her hands from behind her neck, but John saw a certain tenseness come into her pose, and guessed something of what was passing in her mind.

"You see, I had to steal it," he continued. "If I had asked you to give it me, it would have sounded like asking for a keepsake or something foolish."

"Yes," she gasped; for he had answered her thoughts exactly.

"So I had to steal it."

"But why?" The woman within her wanted

to solve the problem: to steal a handkerchief as a keepsake might be comprehensible; but to tell a girl that her handkerchief was not stolen as a keepsake sounded incomprehensible.

But why? Earlier, when he had started for Coombe Lodge, the question would have been easy to answer; he had taken the thing just as he had taken a pebble from the temple court at Kitzuki, as a memento. But now that he realised his true motive, the question was unanswerable, and he must sacrifice the truth to spare Betty's feelings.

"You see," he said, "things mean a lot to me, and I've had a bad time since I landed."

Although he was not making the matter any more comprehensible, she nodded her head in encouragement.

"It is not easy to explain, and I want to make it clear. May I smoke, Miss Standish?"

She smiled her assent.

"I expect you've some odds and ends that you've picked up at different places," he said, lighting his cigarette; "and you turn them over now and then, and think of the different places where you got them?"

"I have," she answered.

"Well, Orientals think a lot more of inanimate

things than we do, and most people who've been much in the East catch the habit, so I got into the way of keeping some memento of each place where I'd been particularly happy: I've a sprig of maple from my old garden, and a pebble from a temple courtyard, and a lot more odds and ends, locked away in my despatch-box. When I'm a bit depressed, I take out these things; it's like reading an old diary. Do you understand?"

"Quite," said Betty.

So far he had been telling the truth; now he had to draw on his imagination; so he looked at her face, and went on: "I'd been awfully bored in town. Everyone I knew was away, and I came down to Tracey with a bad attack of the blues. Then I went out fishing this morning, and had quite the jolliest time of my life. First I caught the biggest trout in the Otter; then I hooked a spaniel; then I met an amusing lady who talked like Izaak Walton; altogether it was a ripping morning, and I wanted something to remember it by—a sort of leaf for my diary."

"I see," said Betty. "You wanted this handkerchief as a record of the trout, the spaniel, and the amusing lady. By the way, Mr. Tracey, was the first remark of the amusing lady written down?"

“Certainly!” answered John, readily. “She said: ‘O honourable sir, honourably deign to cease from drowning my unworthy dog.’”

The girl gave a happy little laugh, and looked even more saucy than she did before. She was again feeling safe with John, and she must needs take advantage. “Have you,” she asked, tilting her chin, “many lace handkerchiefs in your collection, Mr. Tracey?”

He was a trifle over-confident after getting out of his first difficulty, and a trifle over-anxious to clear himself from the implied accusation. “As a matter of fact,” he said, “it’s the only thing a woman’s touched that I ever wanted to keep.” Then he caught himself up: “It was only an accident that it happened to be a handkerchief, and it’s a double accident that it happened to be yours.”

“Of course!” said she, sweetly.

“I couldn’t take that trout—I mean the second one—the Izaak Walton one—because I’d given it to you; besides, fancy keeping a trout in one’s despatch-box! I couldn’t have taken rushes or flowers, because they hadn’t anything to do with the story. It was a case of your handkerchief or nothing.”

"Let us review the situation, Mr. Tracey." Whether she believed him or not, she was enjoying his ingenuity; and he certainly was not attempting to flirt. "You found a silly girl with a page of your private journal; she was so ignorant that she could not read it; in fact," (her voice sank to a whisper) "she was using it to wipe her nose. I think you were right to rescue it."

"No! Miss Standish. I was not right; nothing can justify a theft; one mustn't do wrong that right may come!" He flung down his cigarette-end with determination.

"Now, I do not propose to continue in this theft." (She wondered what was coming.) "I do not consider that I have known you sufficiently long to justify my asking for the handkerchief." (She felt relieved.) "Least of all do I propose to return it." (What on earth was this extraordinary man, who collected scraps of Japanese temples and a girl's handkerchief as pages of his object journal, going to suggest?)

"What I am going to propose is that we return to the primitive system of barter: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a lace handkerchief for a lace handkerchief." He produced the envelope, and handed the handkerchief to Betty.

"But I couldn't!" cried the girl. "It's too beautiful! It's too valuable!"

"It belonged to my mother," said John, gently.

O wise John Tracey! Could any girl put aside such a delicate compliment? It belonged to a woman, therefore he could not use it; it belonged to his mother, therefore he could not sell it; it belonged to the woman he respected most, therefore it was an offering of intense respect. If the object had been a diamond tiara, Betty could hardly have refused it.

She unfolded the handkerchief, and the lavender blossom fell out.

"Yours smelt of lavender," he explained.

"Thank you, Mr. Tracey," she said, looking down; "I shall value it"; but whether this referred to the handkerchief, or the handkerchief scented with lavender, is uncertain.

The man felt a strong sense of dissatisfaction; perhaps it was this real ending to an artificial conversation that caused it. All the absurd talk about the puppy had been real enough because it had been natural; but this posing about the handkerchief and the object diary had been insincere. He had planned a comedy, and his conversation had become a comedy. Besides, what he had said had not been

truthful, and although he had no foolish scruples about the necessity of telling the whole truth, irrespective of the pain it might cause others, he could not stand prevarication to Betty:

“Look here, Miss Standish,” he blurted out. “It was all rot about my wanting your handkerchief for a page of my journal. I began like a silly idiot about stealing your handkerchief, and it sounded as if I was trying to take a liberty, and I tried to shuffle out of it. I took the thing because I liked you, and I’m awfully sorry.”

He had risen and was standing before her, and she was looking down. If he had remained seated, he might have seen that she was not very angry.

“I think you called to see my father?” suggested Betty; “and it’s nearly lunch time.” She held out both her hands so he might help her up, which was surely a sign of forgiveness.

Then, just as they reached the house, she felt that she might have said something when he owned up—and she felt that she did not want to hurt him—so she looked up and said: “I think we shall be friends, Mr. Tracey.”

John Tracey’s love-making had gone much further than he knew, and this because it had been entirely spontaneous; and you will find that when

a man is deeply in love with the right girl, his courtship runs very smoothly and very swiftly, partly because the man is thinking about the girl's feelings and not his own, and partly because the girl knows that she can trust the man. No woman resents a man's admiration; what she does resent—and she resents it above all things—is the feeling that she is being held cheaply; what she hates—and she hates it abominably—is the taking of any liberty which assumes that her consent is a foregone conclusion. John's secret theft of the handkerchief had been a sin; John's prevarication to account for the theft had been a sin; but, when one sin implies admiration and the other sin implies respect, two sins can make one solid virtue. John's last confession—just as if she had not seen through him all the time!—made her think very sweetly of him.

It was true that Betty was engaged; but her engagement was what might be called an engagement of propinquity. She had known the boy to whom she was engaged all her life; she was genuinely fond of him, and he of her; they had shared their sweets; she had kept watch whilst he smoked cigarettes; he had taken her otter-hunting; she had bucked him up when he was working for Sandhurst; he had brought her partners at her first

dance. She liked the boy immensely; he combined his liking with much admiration and that sexual fondness which any boy feels towards any very pretty girl who does not happen to be his sister. So when he had asked her to marry him, she, after some hesitation and with an entire lack of worldly wisdom, had said "Yes!" But, since they were not in a position to marry and they expected opposition from Colonel Standish, they had decided to keep their engagement secret. Their love-making had not been sufficiently vigorous to rob Betty of any of her freshness; and the engagement had certainly preserved the boy from feminine snares. However, it must be noted that the boy's affection was not strong enough to prevent him from extravagance, and he had not reached the stage where he would deny himself so as to save up for his marriage.

Strange to say, the very fact of Betty's engagement made her intimacy with Tracey the more easy; because, if the other man's actions and her emotions towards him were love, then John's behaviour and her answering feelings were friendship. This sounds incomprehensible, but one finds an elementary simplicity in many young girls, combined with much intuition and natural wisdom.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE HEAT OF THE DAY

JOHN TRACEY had finished his sketchy lunch and, as he had several hours to kill before the Standishes came up to shoot pigeons, he was sitting under the portico with a cup of coffee beside him and a cigarette between his fingers. The morning had moved fast, and he wanted to think things over.

The incidents of the morning were past. He had bungled the affair of the handkerchief from start to finish; but he had acted for the best, and he gathered that he had not left a bad impression on Betty's mind. He was not the sort of man to waste his time in vain regrets, nor was he the man to spend himself on day-dreams. Before he had realised that he was in love, he had yielded to pleasant fancies; but now that he knew he was in love, he woke to action.

He was in love, and he was in love without any mental reservations. The fifteen years which separated him from Betty were not worth the shrug of his shoulders; the Tracey luck had become as nebulous as Mrs. Eddy's Christian Science. He did

not wonder if he and Betty would get on well together or if he would make her happy. He just loved her, and meant to win her.

If he had weighed the pros and cons, he would probably have come to the conclusion that he was well off and could offer Betty a good position in the County, that he had led a clean life, and that he was good tempered. He might also have concluded that he could offer the girl a very honest devotion, which certainly counts for something; but he did not give a thought to these matters—what he had to decide was his course of action.

In the first place (he was strangely feudal and old-fashioned in some of his ideas) he would ask Colonel Standish for leave to pay his addresses. In the second place, he would see as much of the girl as possible, so that she might learn to know him. In the third place—since he intended to be much with Betty, and Coombe Ottery is no less given to scandal than other country towns—he must face the possibility of a refusal. He did not intend that Betty should refuse him, and he saw no sense in meeting troubles halfway, but if the worst happened, he would leave Tracey. If he went abroad suddenly, gossip must jump at the right conclusion; and the men would be so busy laughing at John Tracey,

aged thirty-five, who had made a fool of himself over a girl of twenty, and the women would be so grateful to Betty for refusing one of the few eligible bachelors, that gossip would leave her untouched.

Then he began to make plans for seeing a great deal of Betty, and, although he had only thought of starting with the Colonel's consent because it seemed the straight thing to do, this made his plans possible. There were some days of the trouting season left, and he might offer to teach her to cast a fly. He might offer to give Peter some lessons in obedience, and Peter's mistress would naturally accompany them on their expeditions; and, by Jove! he might take the girl out riding. He wondered if there was anything in the stables that would carry a lady. He would go and see. That reminded him—there were the spaniels to visit and the keeper to interview—and he had forgotten to arrange about the pigeon-shooting for the afternoon.

Tracey strolled through the coach-house yard, and through a side door into the stables. No! The horses were either carriage horses or weight carriers, there was nothing that would serve as a lady's hack. He stood still, took out his cigarette-case, and looked lazily through the stable door.

There was a stable-boy in the yard, grooming a pony which had just been driven into Coombe Ottery for some parcels. As John watched, the pony flicked its tail into the boy's eye; whereupon the boy, not seeing his master, kicked the poor beast twice in rather a brutal manner. John called the boy—he had turned as white as a sheet when he heard John's voice—and told him to go at once to the coachman, and report that he had been dismissed without a character. It did not matter that the stable-boy turned out to be the coachman's son, and that the coachman had been in his place for seventeen years; the boy had been given a certain trust, the care of the pony, and he had failed in his trust.

John went through the stable-yard, through the long, low, sweet-smelling cowhouse adjoining, and passed into the kennels. Bedlam was let loose, and a crowd of small red spaniels precipitated themselves against the bars, and a smart-looking keeper stepped forward to meet him. He looked keenly at the man, then held out his hand.

“By Jove!” said John, “I am pleased!”

The keeper mumbled a mixture of thanks and welcome, but his face said what his tongue refused to say. Long ago, Weymouth had been the most

unsatisfactory boy on the estate. He had been bright, smart, and well spoken, but he had shown a strong dislike of honest work, and a strong inclination towards poaching. John had managed to catch him with his pockets full of pheasants' eggs, and had first thrashed him and then taken him on as gun-boy. This was before Tracey had developed something of the family character, and when he himself was smarting under the Tracey discipline.

"Gill told me that I should find Weymouth a surprise," said John, smiling. He understood now why the new keeper had mounted the right flies on his cast, and why everything had been exactly as it should be.

"It's all owing to you, sir," muttered Weymouth, awkwardly. "I'm glad you've come, sir. The dogs have been uncommonly restless ever since you came back."

"Nonsense!" said John. "I don't believe there are two dogs that remember me."

"Old Pluto and Plato are living, sir; and old Peggy, though she's getting a bit mellow. But the whole kennel knows there's a Tracey about, sure enough."

He visited each kennel in turn. Pluto and Plato

clearly remembered him, and even the "mellow" Peggy wagged her tail vigorously; but the conduct of the younger dogs was distinctly uncanny; for all seemed as though they knew their master, all fawned about his feet, and each held up a right paw as he stooped to pat it.

"The Tracey breed, sure enough!" remarked Weymouth—though whether he referred to the dogs or their master is uncertain.

The prospect of pigeon-shooting promised well, for the keeper, knowing that the barley was not all cut, and that the partridges were somewhat backward, had made preparations against his master's home-coming.

Wood pigeons are clever birds, and if they are shot for a couple of evenings in one plantation, they come to roost in another. For the past fortnight Weymouth had been shooting the homing pigeons in the woods at the top of the hill, consequently towards evening the lower woods, right up to the house, were simply crowded with pigeons. An hour before sundown, the first birds would appear from nowhere, top the tall elms in the park, and swoop down into the firs and larches; and the homing would continue for a full hour, giving some of the finest and most difficult shooting imaginable. A

pigeon that swoops down into its roost comes like a falling arrow, and a falling shot is infinitely more difficult than one at a rising bird.

“Heigh-ho!” From three o’clock until five seemed like a foretaste of eternity!

CHAPTER VIII

WOMAN IN THE ABSTRACT

BUT at four-thirty the Standishes strolled up the Tracey drive. That is to say, the Colonel tried to disguise his rheumatism under a leisurely saunter, whilst Betty kept pace.

The explanation was simple: Colonel Standish had received an important letter, which must be answered by the five-thirty post; and, as he could not send Betty over to tea by herself, he would ask Tracey to amuse his daughter and allow him to write his letter in the library. Yes! he would like a whisky-and-soda, many thanks; awfully bad for him all the same. He'd join them as soon as he had finished the letter. So John carried off the girl with much inward rejoicing, and asked her what she would like to do.

"It's too hot to do anything," she said. "Let's sit on the rosery bank and talk." They went down the long flight of marble steps that led to the rosery with its formal beds of standard roses, its fountain

and its gold-fish. It was a peaceful spot, shut away from the world, and warm and sweet-scented.

"Now you've got to amuse me, Mr. Tracey," said the girl, throwing herself on the slope. "Remember I'm your guest."

"What shall I talk about?" asked John, seating himself by sections and hitching up his trousers.

"Tell me about the Japanese women."

He cast about in his mind as to what he should tell, and how he should tell it. Did she want to hear about the way they did their hair? If so, he had a delightful book by Lafcadio Hearn which he would fetch. She made a little face with a fascinating wrinkling of her nose.

Did she want to hear the story of O-Kama-San, who killed herself in the Tokoji cemetery because her lover failed to hurry back from Europe to volunteer against the Russians? She shook her head, for the subject did not greatly interest her.

Did she want to hear about the samurai girl, who tested her lover's bravery by taking him to a grave at midnight and bidding him eat a bit of a dead baby, which really proved to have been made of confectionery?

"I want to hear about Japanese woman," said Betty, "not Japanese women!"

“ Woman in the abstract? ”

“ Please talk as if I were a man! ” she asked wistfully. “ You see, Mr. Tracey, I used to be great friends with Captain Postlethwaite, and I am great friends with my father, and they talk to me as if I were one of themselves.”

“ I wish you'd explain,” said John.

“ It's like this,” said she, picking a daisy and stroking its petals against her mouth: “ Women talk about everything as it affects them personally——” She thought a moment, catching the daisy petals between her lips. “ Men talk about everything as if they were sitting on the top of the Alps and discussing America. Isn't that awfully clever, Mr. Tracey? ” She looked at him and laughed gleefully, for had not her last sentence been “ feminine,” and introduced the personal element?

In a general way the girl was right, but her youth had made her forget the inevitable exceptions. It may be true that most women are incapable of the abstract—just try to talk to an authoress about abstract literary work, and see how long it is before you are talking about her work in the concrete!—but some women are capable of the abstract (Betty herself was an example) and then they add the interesting quality of a man to the delightful quality of

a woman. A woman with a man's mind is a sexless creature; but a woman who combines a man's intellect with a woman's nimbleness and a woman's sympathy is charming beyond description.

"Then, you don't want to hear about the tea-house girl?—she's just a dainty little A.B.C. waitress."

"No!" said Betty.

"Or the geisha?—she's a sort of paid guest."

"No!" said Betty.

"Then you want to hear about the samurai woman!"

"I'm afraid I'm awfully ignorant," said she, "but I always thought the samurai was a sort of officer. I want to hear about the Japanese lady—in the abstract," she added, smiling.

"How can you formulate a lady in the abstract?" said he, smiling back. "You must start her in the concrete, and abstract her afterwards."

"But what is a 'samurai woman'?" inquired Betty, seriously.

"We used to have a samurai class in England," he answered. "A business man or attorney did not belong to the samurai class, but the army, navy, church, and bar did. A duke might marry a samurai girl, and the duke's youngest daughter might marry

the rector—I am speaking of the time when ‘gentleman’ meant ‘of gentle birth,’ and the ‘upper-middle-class’ hadn’t been invented.”

“I see what you mean,” said she.

“In Japan, there was no navy, the priests were unmarried, and the law was administered by the Shogun or a daimyo: therefore the samurai was a soldier. He wasn’t a samurai because he was a soldier, but because soldiering was the only profession open to the samurai. He was the same as our old idea of a gentleman, and a samurai woman was one who had inherited the instincts and traditions of the samurai class. You are a samurai girl; but, although Miss Soap-boiler may have been as well educated and as highly cultivated, she could never belong to the samurai class: her traditions and instincts would be different.”

“It’s rather nice to feel that one’s a samurai girl,” said Betty; “and you’re making me awfully interested in the Japanese lady, Mr. Tracey.”

“The samurai lady’s very shy and modest and humble; but I always think that this is due to centuries of training, and not to her natural disposition. Long ago, before the Shoguns came into power, the court ladies seem to have been as witty and human as any Englishwoman. For example,

one of the court ladies who lived about nine hundred years ago has left a book describing what she saw and thought, and it's as modern as 'The Letters of Elizabeth.' "

"Tell me something about it, Mr. Tracey."

"I'm afraid I can't remember much," owned John; "but she gave a list of 'the things that give one a thrill,' and included: 'A good-looking man who stops his carriage to ask you the way.' How does that strike you, Miss Standish?"

"Oh! Delightful!" laughed Betty.

"And she includes amongst her 'detestable things,' 'People who interrupt your best stories in order to show off their own cleverness,' and 'A man to sing the praises of some woman he has known, whilst he professes an admiration for you.' "

"How awfully true!"

"Court life seems to have been very smart, with plenty of love-making. They had poetry teas, just as we have book teas now, and everyone had to make up smart little poems on the spur of the moment. But everything changed when the Shoguns put down flirting and substituted soldiering."

"But why?" asked Betty.

"I suppose flirting put a man off his fighting. The samurai was taught to practise a life of absolute

self-restraint and perfect devotion to his over-lord; he mustn't let any girl come between him and his duty. In fact, the samurai had to be the sword."

"Had to be the sword, Mr. Tracey?"

"Yes! He had to be the sword. His emotions were nothing; his life was nothing; he was just the sword in his daimyo's hand. The old samurai was a magnificent fellow, modest, unselfish, and as loyal and keen as a sword. If he had thought of his wife before his duty, or come under a woman's influence, it would have spoilt him. It was the samurai spirit that made the Japanese do such marvellous things in the Russian war."

"It's much the same in England," said Betty, thoughtfully. "When Mrs. Colonel begins to talk about 'my regiment,' it's fatal to soldiering."

Well, Miss Standish, the samurai's wife had to fit herself in, somehow. She couldn't practise loyalty towards the daimyo—her duty was towards her husband—so she made him her daimyo. She had been taught from babyhood to be modest, truthful, charitable, and dainty—she mustn't gossip with the servants or listen to scandal—and she devoted all these good qualities to her husband, with perfect loyalty. By the way, the Japanese gentlemen are simply devoted to their wives and children."

"I don't wonder!" cried the girl. "I wish we were more like them! Why didn't you marry a Japanese, Mr. Tracey?"

John raised himself on his elbow, and looked at her. She was disclosing quite a new Betty to him. "What are your ideas of the right sort of English-woman, Miss Standish?" he asked.

"I think she ought to be a little different from the Japanese," she answered. "I think she ought to be just as loyal and free from gossip; but I think she ought to be quite as keen as a man. I think she ought to understand enough about her husband's work to take a tremendous interest, without interfering."

"You don't give her a very important part, Miss Standish."

Betty smiled wisely: "I think she would encourage her husband to do better than anyone else. I think"—her eyes were fixed on the daisy—"her samurai would be a very good samurai."

John was simply worshipping her. "I think so too," he said softly.

It will be noticed that they were discussing married woman, not woman in the abstract.

"But, you mustn't think I'm not modern!" Betty flung down what was left of the daisy. "A

woman may have her own work, just as much as a man: she may have something beside house-keeping and—and encouraging her husband. How shall I explain it? I suppose you'll look after your estate——? What do you call looking after your estate, Mr. Tracey? ”

“Duty,” said he.

“Oh! How perfect!” cried Betty. “That makes what I'm trying to say so easy! The work that a man has to do, or ought to do, is his duty. The work that he does for the work's sake is his work: dad's command of his regiment was his duty; his book on cavalry scouting was his work. Perhaps a man's work isn't the best thing he does,”—the Colonel's book on scouting had been severely criticised—“but it's the realest part of him.”

“Do you realise that you've said something very clever?” asked John; but she was too interested in the development of her theme to notice his praise.

“Have you any work, Mr. Tracey?”

He told her about his book on Japan, and she entered into the scheme with her whole soul. She was engaged, and the possibility of marrying John Tracey never entered her mind to embarrass her. “Your estate will be your duty, Mr. Tracey, and your book will be your work; and, if you were mar-

ried, your wife ought to take a tremendous interest in 'An English View of Japan,' because it would be the realest part of you."

"A woman's house and husband are her duty," she continued; "but she may have her work too—writing or painting or something—and if she's my idea of a woman, she ought to want her husband to treat her work like man's work, and not flatter."

"What's your work, Miss Standish?" asked John.

"I don't know," she answered, looking troubled.

Then it dawned on John that Betty's work in life was to give the world children, as sweet and wholesome as herself; and he helped her up with great reverence.

CHAPTER IX

RABBITS AND PIGEONS

TEA was finished, and the lengthening shadows and cooling air showed that it was time to be getting after the pigeons; but if you had only seen how the sunshine, filtering through the yellow blinds, had converted Betty and her holland dress into a symphony in golden yellow, you would have understood that John was in no hurry to leave the drawing-room. The girl was sitting in an easy-chair, the floor was polished, and there was a small mahogany table with a vase of Maréchal Niel roses beside her: all things considered, Whistler must have been a mere dauber—at least so John thought.

But time was passing, and Tracey returned to a subject which he had broached earlier in the afternoon. "Then you'll stay for dinner, Colonel?"

"Hum," replied the Colonel, who was feeling comfortable, and who wanted to stay, "I can't sit down in this kit. Besides, you'll be sick of us, Tracey."

"Think of my hair," added Betty.

“As for your clothes, sir,” said John, persuasively, “we’ll have a pigeon dinner, just as we are. It will give me an excuse for not changing. As for your hair, Miss Standish,” said he, looking down at her, “you should just see how Gill arranges flowers. He’ll crown you with roses or garnish you with stephanotis, and I believe maidenhair is rather a weakness of his.” Again he turned to the Colonel: “Then it’s settled, sir? Well, I suppose we ought to be moving.” He held back the blind, so that his guests could go out into the portico.

“I think Tracey likes to have his way,” remarked the Colonel as he stepped through the window, and held out his hand to help his daughter.

“I think Mr. Tracey generally has his way,” corrected Betty.

“Please God!” said John Tracey.

Weymouth and an under-keeper were waiting outside on the terrace, the former with a couple of spaniels, the latter carrying the guns. “If you send for some pigeons for the kitchen at six, and come yourself about six-thirty, we shan’t want you now,” said John. “Yes, sir,” answered Weymouth, somewhat disappointed; and Betty looked her gratitude, for it is nervous work for a girl, even though she may handle her gun well, to shoot pigeons before

two professionals. Then, shouldering his own and Betty's guns, Tracey led the way along the tarred path below the rosery. There were large, unkempt clumps of laurels and rhododendrons on either side, and the path was overshadowed by pines.

"If you and Miss Standish walk in front, sir," suggested John, "I'll work the dogs. We ought to pick up some rabbits." He loaded Betty's gun and handed it to her; then he made a motion with his hand, and one of the spaniels disappeared into the bushes on the right of the path, whilst the other worked the bushes on the left.

Yap! yap! Bang! A rabbit had dodged from one clump of shrubs to another, and Colonel Standish had missed it clean.

Yap! The rabbit scuttled across the path, only to be bowled over by the girl. It was a nice clean shot, well forward.

"Miss Standish wiped your eye then, sir," laughed John, taking the rabbit from the spaniel and laying it in the middle of the path for Weymouth to pick up later.

"She did," owned the Colonel. "But I want to see those dogs of yours work, Tracey."

"Mind, this is the first time I've worked these spaniels," said John, "so it's hardly fair to them.

There's a great deal in a dog knowing your voice." "Prentice! Prince!" The spaniels came to heel. He motioned his hand forward; they trotted along the path for some sixty yards and looked round; he waved his hand twice to the left, and they entered an extra thick clump of rhododendrons.

Yap! Yap! A brace of rabbits bolted, to be rolled over right and left by Colonel Standish.

"He's a regular old poacher," cried Betty with a shrug of her shoulders. "That second rabbit was really mine, Mr. Tracey; it crossed the path before he fired."

"I believe she really thinks so," said the Colonel, pinching her ear affectionately, and watching the spaniels retrieve the game. "By Gad, aren't those dogs pleased!"

"Whenever you care for a morning's rabbiting, Colonel," said John, "and don't want to be bothered with a keeper, you've only to call for Prentice and Prince and work the lower woods. It's a funny thing, but dogs will do anything for a man who kills his game, whilst they'll either sulk or run wild with a duffer."

"It's awfully good of you, Tracey." There was real gratitude in the Colonel's voice: he had been too stiff lately to look forward to partridge shooting

with pleasure, and had been feeling a trifle low in consequence.

“Not a bit, sir,” answered John. “I’ve a book to write, and generally speaking I’m up to my eyes in work. I should be grateful if you’d keep down the rabbits.” Thus do English gentlemen confer a favour.

“Mark!” said John, as another rabbit bolted; but although the rabbit bolted on the Colonel’s side, the Colonel was not ready, and it was Betty’s gun that transmigrated the rabbit’s soul to its next reincarnation. So they walked on, leaving eight or nine rabbits in the centre of the pathway.

“Those are our decoys, sir,” remarked John, presently, pointing upwards to half a dozen pigeons on the top of some low fir-trees. “We have real pigeons stuffed and mounted like weathercocks, so that their heads always point up-wind. “Live pigeons,” he added, turning to Betty, “always sit facing the wind; they don’t like having their feathers ruffled.”

Some eddy breeze caught one of the pigeons, and it moved slightly. “By Jove!” muttered the Colonel, “they’re almost alive!”

“Now the birds will fly across the park,” continued John, “and come down over that row of elms

which edge the park so as to pitch into the fir-trees. If we stand close under the elms, the pigeons won't see us till it's too late, and we ought to get some very pretty shooting."

Tracey posted his guns, with Colonel Standish in the centre and Betty and himself on either side. He placed the girl so that the birds would come from her right to left, which is the easiest way of taking a difficult shot.

"Mr. Tracey," asked Betty, softly, "why wasn't my father poaching just now; the rabbit was on my side of the path?" She had evidently been dwelling on the question.

He smiled because it was such a feminine question to ask, and so unlike Betty. "The rabbit came from his side, and gave him the best chance," he whispered; "it was his till he'd had his chance. You can't have boundaries in sport; it's give and take. It's when you are mean and steal the other man's chances, that it's poaching."

"Thanks," she whispered back; "I see."

He walked over to his place, treading on air—the first confidential question marks an epoch in a friendship—and had hardly placed himself, when the opening flight of pigeons glided between the Colonel and Betty. The Colonel got a right and

left; Betty missed. Again, a single bird came over Betty, and was missed.

"Gad! it's sportin'," remarked the Colonel. His last shot had been a tricky one, and he was pleased with himself.

"It's the most difficult shooting I know, sir. It's like shooting at falling glass balls that you haven't seen thrown up." Then he crossed over to Betty, and asked if he might look at her gun.

"It's only a second-hand one which I saw advertised," she explained. "It isn't up to much, but I've grown used to it."

She handed it to him, and he put it up to his shoulder. "It may do all right for rabbiting, Miss Standish," said he, "but it's no good for this sort of work. It's too long and heavy in the barrel; it's too long and bent in the stock; and you're bound to shoot below your bird. Look!" He swung the gun as if to follow an imaginary bird from over the elm-trees. "You follow your bird down," he explained; "the bent stock and heavy barrel pull the gun downwards, and you shoot below the bird. It's bound to happen. I want you to try my gun; it's a sixteen-bore Holland, and you'll either kill or miss."

"But——"

"Please try it!" There was that note of finality

in John's voice that marks the difference between conferring a favour, and offering an act of courtesy from a man to a woman: you hear the same note when the right sort of man offers his seat to a woman in the Underground. She refuses, and he says: "Please take my seat." It is something that every woman likes to hear because it offers homage to her womanhood; it is something that no woman can refuse without unsexing herself. If John had been thrilled by Betty's confidence, Betty was thrilled now—in a friendship between a lady and a gentleman, the first time the man speaks to the woman marks an epoch.

"Thank you," said Betty; and, what was more, she looked her thanks.

She held out her hand for the gun, and was just going to try the feel of it, when a single bird "dropped out of everywhere into here." She fired, and the bird continued its descent.

"What a ripping shot!" said Tracey.

"It's the gun," said she. "It's as light as a feather, and as handy as anything."

Tracey had hardly returned to his station before the homing began in earnest. He incontinently killed the three first birds with three shots from Betty's ill-conditioned fowling-piece, and was an-

swered with three soft laughs from the other end of the firing line. Then the Colonel and Betty became busy. Colonel Standish was alternately killing and swearing below his breath; Betty was bringing down her birds in an astonishing manner. The girl was what is called "a fine natural shot," and she was not handicapped by the formed habit of shooting at rising birds like a more experienced sportsman. At six o'clock, the under-keeper was able to select four brace of the plumpest young pigeons he had ever come across; at a quarter to seven, Weymouth came and opened his eyes at the pile of pigeons that had fallen to the three guns.

The light was beginning to fail when John suggested that they should send the dogs home by the keepers, and walk back along the upper path on the chance of picking up a rabbit in the 'tween-lights. They walked along the path, the Colonel and Betty in front and John behind: a few shots had been fired at shadowy rabbits, and John had bagged a brace when something moved in the undergrowth—it looked almost like a rabbit in the half-light.

"Don't!" shouted John, as Betty's gun went to her shoulder; but as he shouted she fired, and the something waltzed into the open, biting its flank.

"Damn!" muttered the Colonel, as John fired

both barrels to put the waltzing thing out of pain. What happened then is indescribable.

To say that Colonel Standish swore, would be to tell one of those half truths which is the worst form of untruthfulness; for he swore like a peppery gentleman, he swore only as a safety-valve, and he did not give way to a single recrimination; if he had bitten his lip and suggested that the girl had made a pretty mess, it would have been a thousand times worse. To say that Tracey was calm, would be to ignore that he was exceedingly sorry for Betty. The two of them treated the accident as a sort of family catastrophe, and not as something that Betty had done.

“It was my fault for keeping on shooting,” said John. “We ought to have knocked off before it grew dusk; it might have happened to me or anyone!”

“I nearly shot the beggar, myself!” Alas for truth! The Colonel had not even seen the incident until it was too late to prevent the shot.

“But a fox!” sobbed Betty, clutching at John’s arm. Then she buried her face in her hands.

“Look here,” said John, pulling down one of her hands and holding it firmly. “Everyone does something awful, once or twice—jumps on a hound, or

shoots a beater, or something—we're not a parcel of duffers. It's all right if we don't try to hide it. Is Middleton still the M.F.H., Colonel?"

"Middleton," answered the Colonel more cheerfully, "is a good chap."

"He's one of my oldest friends," continued John with relief, "I've only to tell him, and he'll keep the thing dark. Besides, we've more cubs at Tracey this year than I can stand, and more than they can kill cubbing. He'll have to thin off some in any case."

"Is that so?" asked Colonel Standish somewhat doubtfully.

"Yes!" answered John, glancing at Betty. "And look here, Miss Standish, I'll write to Middleton and tell him how I managed to kill the cub. You know, sir"—this to the Colonel—"I don't believe Miss Standish did more than pepper him—I believe he'd have gone off all right when he got over the shock—I wish I hadn't been so infernally hasty."

"No!" cried Betty, recovering her hand from Tracey; "it's very sweet of you, and all that; but I shot the fox, and I'm going to play the game. Dad, would you let Mr. Tracey sacrifice himself, if you were me?"

“Certainly not!” said Colonel Standish with decision. “We must tell Middleton ex-act-ly what happened.”

Then she realised that Tracey was being very good to her, and (it was getting quite dusk) she slipped her hand into his and gave it the ghost of a squeeze, and whispered: “I understand.” But Colonel Standish was beginning to understand far more than she did.

“Well, here goes!” said Tracey, flinging the cub into the laurels. He placed an old envelope beside the path so that Weymouth could find the spot, and asked Betty for a hair-pin to pin down the paper.

“By Gad!” thought the Colonel, as he fell behind and let the other two walk on in front. It had never seriously occurred to him that he must sooner or later lose Betty, and he did not like the idea. If he could have chosen, he would have preferred a younger man, but Tracey was a good chap and well off. He would not have thought anything of Tracey’s extreme friendliness; he would not have thought anything of Tracey’s extreme chivalry over the cub; but he had seen him looking at Betty when she was looking the other way, and—well——

The Standishes seated themselves in low, comfortable chairs before the drawing-room fire, for

the evening had grown cool enough to make a fire welcome, whilst John went to the writing-table.

"DEAR MIDDLETON," he wrote, "Colonel and Miss Standish were rabbiting with me this afternoon. As we were coming home in the dusk, Miss Standish caught sight of something moving, and had the ill-luck to pot a cub instead of a rabbit. You or I might have made the same mistake. If there is any blame, it is mine for not knocking off sooner.

"By the way, I want to see you about killing off some of the cubs. We have no less than five earths this year, and I don't believe in expatriating the infants.

"Yours,

"JOHN M. TRACEY."

"Now add something, Miss Standish," said John, handing the letter to Betty. "We'll make it a round robin." She read through the letter and added:

"I would almost rather have shot a spaniel.

"BETTY STANDISH."

The Colonel stretched out his hand, and, after reading, added:

"Damn! W. V. S."

“ I must put in a postscript, asking him to keep the matter dark,” said John; but he really wrote:

“ If you can come over this evening, I’ll send a cart for you. The girl’s heart-broken.—J. M. T.”

He sent off the letter by a groom.

“ This is the first time, for more’n twelve years, that I’ve tried my hand at gardenin’,” grinned Weymouth (a keeper may preserve foxes, but he hates them all the same) as he cut out the sods that were stained by the life-blood of the infant vixen, and replaced them with fresh turf. “ Now for the funeral! ”

CHAPTER X

DINNER

BETTY had gone upstairs, conducted by the housekeeper, to find a cup of tea awaiting her and one of the housemaids ready to assist with the toilet.

As soon as the drawing-room door had closed behind her, Tracey turned to the Colonel, and the Colonel turned to Tracey. "I think, sir," said John, ringing the bell, "a liqueur brandy—and—wine glasses."

"Tumblers—peg tumblers—whew!" and they relapsed into silence.

"If it had only been one of us, sir——!" said John, sipping his cognac.

"A girl! And a keen little sportswoman at that! Oh, damn!" Colonel Standish emptied his glass and set it down on the table. "If it gets about, it'll break her heart!"

"But it can't get about, sir. Only we three and Weymouth and Middleton know, and I'll answer for both Weymouth and Middleton."

"Hum—yes—I suppose so," grunted the Colonel, and again silence reigned.

"It makes one feel as if one had been mixed up in a murder," mused John—"accessory after fact—doesn't it?"

"Can't say, Tracey—haven't your experience. By Jove! though I'd forgotten—nearly shot a native in mistake for a buck, once. Wanted a drink, too."

"Here's Miss Standish, Colonel," whispered John. "Foxes barred; shooting barred." Then he raised his voice: "He was an awfully clever little chap, sir: he could draw anything in a couple of strokes." John's continuation of an imaginary conversation was a really fine piece of acting.

"Hallo, Miss Standish!" he said, rising very lazily as the girl entered the room. "Has Gill done your hair tastefully? I was telling Colonel Standish about a Japanese artist who came over in the same boat with me. He wasn't one of the real artists, you know, only a wood-engraver, and he was travelling steerage; but he was an awfully clever little chap."

"Yes?" said Betty, seating herself. The tragedy of the vixen had deepened the shading below her eyes in the most bewitching way.

“Well, I used to go over to the steerage and talk to him, and he used to tell me stories. Just before we reached Marseilles, I told him a story from Lafcadio Hearn’s ‘Kwaidan,’ and when I said good-bye he handed me a packet. Here’s his letter.” John went over to the writing-table and picked up a large envelope. “I must explain that he had been partly educated at a mission-school, and partly in a publisher’s office,” he added, handing Betty a letter; “and he was very modern.”

“DEAR SIR,” she read, “I herewith enclose promised pictures which graciously deign to accept. They are only unworthy copies of ancient print, adapted to occasion as per agreement, and are unworthy of honourable notice except to split the sides. But no further ideas to hand. Trusting you will have a ripping journey, D.V.,

“Yours in the faith,

“KINJURO OTANI.”

“Have you read ‘Kwaidan,’ Miss Standish?” inquired John, as she looked up from the letter.

“No!” she answered, smiling.

“I shan’t attempt to tell the particular story Kinjuro has illustrated; you must read it as it is written; but it amounts to this: An old merchant of Tokio was passing a haunted moat, late in the

evening, when he found what appeared to be an honourable damsel weeping, with her head buried in one of her long sleeves. When he begged her to let him help her, the honourable damsel turned round and dropped her sleeve, and stroked her face with her hand; and the man saw that she had no eyes or nose or mouth, and he screamed and ran away. Here's Kinjuro's illustration"; and he handed it to her.

"Oh! No wonder!" said Betty.

"He fled to the light of an itinerant buckwheat seller, crying 'Aa!—aa!!—aa!!!' The pedlar spoke to him roughly, asking what had scared him. 'I saw—I saw a woman—by the moat,' groaned the merchant; '—and she showed me—*Aa!* I cannot tell you what she showed me!'——"

"*He!* Was it anything like THIS that she showed you?' cried the pedlar, stroking his own face—which therewith became like unto an egg—— And, simultaneously the light went out." John handed her the second picture.

"What a heavenly picture!" cried Betty; "and what a heavenly story! And how it piles up the agony! Poor merchant!"

"It does pile up the incident," answered John. "But I'll lend you Hearn's book. I knew him per-

sonally, and he's one of the very few Europeans—only he was an American—who understands the real Japan. But you'd like to wash your hands before dinner, Colonel?" And he led Colonel Standish away for his ablutions.

Betty took up the prints, laid them down, and looked into the fire. What a strange day she had had, and what a lot she had seen of Mr. Tracey. From start to finish he had not bored her a bit, and she did not seem to have bored him. She found him interesting and she liked the way he talked; it wasn't a bit like the way the men she knew talked, nor was it like the few self-improved, self-made men she had come across. (Of course she did not realise that John had been educated at home, whilst the Protestant men that she knew talked public school language.) She wondered how Tom would like him—Tom Courtenay was the man she was engaged to. What a time they were washing their hands!

She got up and strolled into the conservatory which opened out of the drawing-room and which was partly lit by the light that came through the glass doors. The light fell on some late flowering digitalis on the rockery in the corner, and Betty turned away and shuddered: fox-gloves were too suggestive. Then some impulse moved her, and

she took a Maréchal Niel from the rose-bowl on the table, and placed it behind her ear: Mr. Tracey should see that an English girl could look as dainty as a Japanese. She went to a mirror to note the effect. "There's no doubt, Betty Standish," said she, "you're very pretty!" She lifted her chin slightly and smiled at her reflection. Then, for some reason or other, she blushed, took out the rose, and hastily put it back in the rose-bowl.

The dinner itself was delightful, for although the menu might have been a trifle old-fashioned—especially in Gill's desire to serve a full gamut of wines with the different courses—the Traceys had always leant towards Latin refinement rather than towards British profusion. Again, both glass and silver were exquisite, which is no small matter, and Gill's waiting was that art which conceals art.

Betty enjoyed herself. She was a man's girl, which is quite the nicest sort of girl; and she listened to the talk of India and Japan, asking questions, and she joined in the talk of sport and travel, and was treated neither as a canary nor as a puppet; so when dinner was over, and it was time for her to retire to the drawing-room, she was sorry.

"I suppose I ought to catch someone's eye, or someone ought to catch my eye, or something," said

Betty, regretfully. "A (a young girl) and B (her father) are the guests of C (a gentleman). Is that clear, Mr. Tracey?"

"Lucid!" answered John.

"Dinner being finished, and A—knowing that she ought to leave the room—is in doubt as to whether she should catch C's eye or make a move on her own account, and feels shy and miserable. What ought A to do?"

"A should either shuffle her feet so as to attract attention," proposed John, "and then make a movement as though to rise; or else—or else——What else could she do, Colonel?"

"She might say: 'Remember the port's bad for your rheumatism, dad,' and scuttle. Eh, Betty?"

"That's the way I'm treated, Mr. Tracey!" exclaimed Betty, as John drew back her chair. "If you had to live with my father, you'd be pretty careful he did not drink too much port." And she swept across the room with as much dignity as her short holland skirts would permit.

He held open the door for her with expectation; for, when one opens the door for a lady, it is but polite to look down at her and smile; and, when one opens the door for a lady, it is but courteous for the lady to look up and return the smile. "We

won't sit too long over the wine, Miss Standish," said John.

"I could hardly have suggested that, could I?" said she with just the least suspicion of impudence.

"Oh you darling!" thought Tracey.

He returned to his seat and, filling his glass, placed the decanter before Colonel Standish. "To accuse this wine of causing rheumatism," he remarked, "is to accuse a saint of impropriety. It's '63, bottled in '67, and there's not an ache left in the whole bin. Besides," he added, smiling, "as Miss Standish suggested, I don't live with you, sir."

"The worst of a '63 is that you must drink it to save it," said the Colonel, with a sigh. He held his glass up to the light: "Gad, what a colour the wine's got!"—he sniffed it—"and what a bouquet!"

"It's the swan-song of the vintage—'the fading splendour of some great glory!' In another few years, the wine will be merely a curiosity—*Sic transit gloria mundi!* That would make a good motto for a Sunday bean-feast: *transit gloria* should be translated 'elation passes'; *sic mundi* needs no translation. Forgive the pun, Colonel."

"Might be rendered: 'To-day's port—to-morrow's gout.'"

"Sir!" protested Tracey; "my wine leaves no gout. I think we might send the coffee into the drawing-room," he added, as the coffee was brought in. "It will show Miss Standish that we're coming; and it's a sin to spoil this wine."

"It is," said the Colonel.

"And Gill can leave the cigars."

Tracey drew a breath. What he meant to say must be said without interruption, and he had been talking to mark time until the coffee had come.

"I want your permission to try and win Miss Standish, sir," said John, coming straight to the point.

"What?" answered the Colonel, hardly believing his ears. One may contemplate the German invasion as a serious probability, but one would be no less surprised if one was told that the Germans had landed.

"I have fallen in love with Miss Standish, sir," repeated John, quietly; "and I want your consent to start with."

Colonel Standish fingered the stem of his wine-glass, whilst his eyes narrowed. To make such a request on the first day of their acquaintance verged on the brutal. "I think," he answered, dropping out his words one by one, "that—you—had—better

—speak—to—Miss—Standish—ah—first.” Then he warmed up: “By God, Tracey, it isn’t decent!”

“As soon as you have heard my reasons, sir,” answered John with exasperating calmness, “I think you will say that it’s very decent. In the first place, I may clear the way by saying that there is nothing against my character.” He paused to light a cigar with apparent deliberation, but really to arrange what he had to say. “I’m thirty-five, and I know my own mind,” he continued. “I have fallen honestly and deeply in love with your daughter, and I wish for your consent to start with.”

“Gad! You don’t expect me to tie up the girl and hand her over to you,” snapped the Colonel. “She must answer the question herself.”

“I think that I asked permission to try and win your daughter,” said John, dryly. “I fight my own battles.”

The Colonel’s face commenced to clear, and he sipped his port. “I begin to see,” he remarked; then he grew suspicious and added: “She’s very pretty.”

“You may put her face through the mangle, for all I care!” answered John with sudden heat. This really was a very pig-headed old man.

"Then why—hum—what are you in love with?" He had the right to try and fathom this incomprehensible fellow.

Tracey was gravelled.

"Does not mind if she's put through the mangle——" muttered the Colonel. He took a cigar, whilst Tracey filled his own glass, and pushed the decanter towards him. Then he thought of his own personal experience. "You'll—be—hum——" remarked Colonel Standish.

They smoked in silence for some minutes, and it was Colonel Standish who broke covert. "I understand," he grumbled. "Was in love with her mother." Again they smoked in silence, and again the Colonel broke the silence: "Do you mind tellin' me why you asked me before you found out what my daughter thought?"

"It seemed the straight thing," said John. "Besides, I'd have had to ask you some time—and if she refuses me I don't care who knows."

"Or what happens," added the Colonel, sympathetically.

John nodded his head. "Besides, sir, there's too much of the other thing. A man runs after a girl, and she and her people think he's in love until he tells them he's going to marry another girl. Fancy

a modern father asking a man his intentions! I don't like it."

"By Gad! You're right," answered the Colonel. Neither of them realised that, under this plan, a father might use undue influence on behalf of a desirable suitor, even to coercion. Neither realised that a girl might resent having her hand asked for, before she herself had been asked. There are two sides to every question.

"As to the settlement," began John.

"Better ask her to marry you first," interrupted the Colonel. He was accustomed to judge men quickly, and John seemed a most desirable husband for his daughter. He fumbled underneath his waistcoat, and bringing out a small miniature, unhooked it from its chain. "Her mother," he said, handing the portrait to Tracey. "She was an Italian." John saw a face that was almost the exact image of Betty's, and, moved by a mutual impulse, the two men gripped hands.

"We oughtn't to leave Betty any longer?" said her father.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER DINNER

IN trying to reconstruct past social life, there is a great difficulty in reconciling the reputed toper with his actual wine-glass—for example, it will be found that the three-bottle cavalier must have toasted his king over the water no less than forty-six times, before he reached his limit—but although the Tracey glasses were long-stemmed things, stamped with the Stuart roses (and believe me, the Traceys were almost as proud of the presence of this rebel glass, which could not have been melted down for the king's use, as they were of the absence of Stuart silver which could), and although the Colonel and John could not have drunk more than the third of a bottle of port between them, they had spent longer over their conversation than they had intended, and they entered the drawing-room with some concern. However, they found a cheerful Betty, nay more, an excited Betty; for they found Betty with an "Idea."

"I've a plan," said she, pouring out the coffee for John and her father. "It will cost Mr. Tracey

a heap of money, and it'll make a fearful mess, but I think he'll like it."

"The lady has but to command, and the samurai to obey," remarked John, watching her. It was stimulating to watch this particular girl play the hostess in this particular room, and delightfully suggestive.

"Nonsense!" replied Betty, firmly. "It is the samurai that must plan, and the lady who must encourage: besides it must be the samurai's own particular lady. You'll be getting yourself into a frightful tangle, Mr. Tracey, if you start this just because Betty Standish suggested it." She shook her head wisely: "You'll have to do something else because Agnes Porter suggested it, and something else because Mrs. Markham suggested it. Please be logical, Mr. Tracey: I'm in earnest."

"She wants me to be logical, sir," replied John, speaking at Betty through the Colonel. "She plans something, and wants me to do it; but I must only do what I have planned by myself, whilst she must only encourage; and yet, if she encourages me, I'll be entangled with Markham's wife whom I've never met, and with Aggie Porter whom I can only remember as an awful skinny-legged child."

"You're very clever, Mr. Tracey!" she retorted

warmly; for it is very aggravating to be answered with nonsense, when one is in earnest.

"I'm sorry," said John, gently. "If I can do what you suggest, I will."

She had been pouring out some more coffee for herself, and she led the way over to the window at the end of the room, still holding the nearly empty coffee-pot. Pulling the blind outwards, she stepped behind it; John followed her, and Colonel Standish was left to his thoughts.

He found himself in the position of a person who knows one side of the plot of a story, and not the other. He could form a pretty good idea of what Tracey would do, but he was quite in the dark about Betty; he knew John's intentions, but he had no idea how his daughter would respond. He had seen her friendly with St. John Postlethwaite, he had seen her flirt a little with Tom Courtenay; but her sudden friendship with Tracey was entirely different and much more absorbing than her friendship with Postlethwaite, and she was certainly not flirting. Knowing, as we know, more than the Colonel, we may hazard the suggestion that, whilst both John and Betty had that mutual sympathy which is the foundation of real affection, the man had taken the fire of the initiative

whereas the girl had not yet caught the fire of the responsive; that, conscious of her engagement to Courtenay, Betty had no thought of slipping into more than mere friendship with Tracey, and that the idea of falling in love had not entered her mind; but of course, since only fools pretend to understand women, this is only pure guess-work. Colonel Standish was intensely interested in the affair and anxious about its next development, and he was very glad that Tracey had taken him into his confidence.

John backed out from behind the window-blind, and Betty followed him with triumph written all over her. "He sees it, dad," she proclaimed.

"Not in the least, sir," corrected John. "Miss Standish has proposed a scheme based on purely æsthetic grounds; I have evolved a somewhat similar scheme on purely utilitarian grounds. It is for me to plan; Miss Standish may encourage if she likes, and she may get Mrs. Markham and Aggie Porter to help her—it won't make any difference."

"What are you drivin' at?" asked the Colonel.

"He's going to make a lake," answered Betty.

"I'm going to make a mill-dam," corrected Tracey.

"Come and look, dad," she ordered, ignoring

his correction; and, putting down the coffee-pot which was growing somewhat heavy, she again led the way behind the window-blind. "Look!" she said.

The moon was shining on the terrace, the moon was shining on the mist in the valley, and the lights of Coombe Ottery were shining beyond. A train was creeping along the side of the hills opposite, and the lights in the railway carriages looked very jolly.

"Think of those lights reflected from a lake!" suggested Betty.

"And the reflection of the train, like a crawling worm of glory," added Tracey. "But it isn't going to be a lake, sir," he explained. "It's going to be a mill-dam, a nice, useful mill-dam."

"The port's gone to your head, Tracey," laughed the Colonel, knowing full well that there is a more heady wine than was ever pressed from the grape.

"Not in the least, sir. Whilst we were in the dining-room, Miss Standish looked out of this window and imagined a lake; when I came in she suggested a lake. I say that a lake would ruin me, whilst a mill-dam would reflect the lights quite as well."

"What is he driving at?" sighed Colonel Standish.

"You see, Colonel, if I made a lake it would have to be an Anglo-Italian Renaissance Classical lake, with marble steps and statues in keeping with the house, and I should ruin myself, as surely as my grandfather ruined himself building Tracey. If I make a simple mill-pond, it won't cost more than I can afford."

"Don't you see, dad," said Betty; "Mr. Tracey is only laughing at me? I said that the man ought to plan, and the woman encourage, and so he takes my suggestion, and twists it round into a plan of his own."

"If you'll come in, out of the moonshine, I'll explain my plan," said John. "I believe Miss Standish has made a perfectly practical suggestion. Only," he added, "it must be a mill-pond, and I'll show you why."

As they left the window, he managed to get in an aside. "You'll encourage, Miss Standish?" he whispered.

"We'll all encourage," she answered cautiously.

"Now, here's a sketch map," said John, going over to the writing-table, and drawing. Betty

looked over his shoulder, whilst the Colonel waited until the sketch was finished.

“ You will observe, Miss Standish,” remarked Tracey, drawing rapidly, “ that this is Coombe Ottery; the road has a much prettier curve than this, and I am not putting in the trees and hedges. Here comes the far side of the lake—I mean pond—following the mill-leat. The weir would come about ‘ A,’ and that corner of the lake, right up to the bridge, will be hidden and broken by the trees at the bottom of the park. Here is the back view of the house—I’m afraid I’ve drawn it rather wobbly. Is it quite clear? ”

“ But the top of the lake——? ” suggested Betty.

“ Alas! The top of the pond is beyond my skill. Observe the slope of the woods falling towards the lake. We’ll have to cut a sort of cliff, and build a summer-house. Please notice the reflection of the mill, which I now add to my drawing. I subscribe *Johannes M. Tracey fecit.* A.D. 1908, and shall stick it into ‘ The Book of the Traceys.’ ”

“ Sir, you are a great Master! ” said the girl, “ stick it into ‘ The Book of the Traceys.’ ”

“ Madam, it is only your wit that comprehends! ” replied John. “ We will now proceed to tempt criticism.”

"You see, sir," said Tracey, handing the sketch to Colonel Standish, "we start with the old bridge, and the embankment which carries the road to the bridge: this will form one end of the lake. Then



we take the leat which carries the water to Snow's mill: this will form the far side of the lake, and set the level of the water. The mill itself will be left on a sort of island. The slope of the park will form the near side. I think that the arches of the bridge will be high enough to allow one overflow under the bridge, and we must build a big weir at 'A,'

so that the floods may run off without raising the level of the lake—I mean pond. All that will have to be done will be to strengthen and face the road-embankment, build a dam under the bridge, and make the weir: of course the upper end of the lake will have to be dug out and deepened, but this will only need rough labour. The idea seems workable.”

“It’ll cost a lot of money,” said Colonel Standish, gravely. “When you once get playin’ about with water, especially in a light soil like this, you don’t know what’ll happen.”

“Money’s been accumulating for some years, sir,” replied John, “and it will certainly improve the property. Besides, there’ll be a lot out of work round here this winter, and it will only want unskilled labour to dig out the lake.”

“Hum—I see,” remarked the Colonel.

“Make-up relief work is all rot, sir,” continued Tracey. “No one is in earnest, and it demoralises the men; but real honest work will be a blessing to a good many families this winter. And,” he concluded, “think about the trout, Colonel! Three-pounders to a fish!”

“You’re a dear!” cried Betty, impulsively; alluding to the poor, and not to the trout.

He looked at her, as much as to ask whether she

would encourage him in the work; and she, understanding, smiled her consent.

The door opened, and Gill announced: "Captain Middleton!"

Kindly and talkative to a fault—far too kindly for the mastership of a subscription-pack where the subscriptions were sometimes apt to be overlooked, and far too merry-tongued to control the horse-breaking contingent of the Coombe Ottery Foxhounds as they ought to have been controlled—Middleton made straight for Betty, with his hands stretched out.

"I've had Tracey's letter," he said, taking both the girl's hands. "It was a sheer accident. Might have happened to anyone! I've forgotten all about it. It never happened! See? That's your line—it never happened! See? Beastly thing for a girl, simply beastly!"

"It's awfully—kind—of—you—Captain Middleton," answered Betty, with her cheeks as red as fire.

"What's kind? What are you talking about?"

"Why?" stammered Betty—"The—cub—I—sh——"

"What cub?" he interrupted. "I'd like to catch anyone meddling with one of my cubs! Don't you understand? It never happened! See? By this

and by that," he rattled on, turning to Tracey, "of course you'll hunt this season, John—and you'll hunt in pink! See? I'll never speak to you again if you don't turn out in pink! See? Too many ratcatchers out with the hounds. Dress same colour as the hedges, and curse if they're jumped on. I'll have some whisky before I drive home. Must be getting back. Ever tasted the Tracey whisky, Standish? Tracey's ancestor'd never have jabbed old Thomas à Becket, if he'd stuck to the whisky——"

And so on; and so on. One had to come to Middleton with some trouble, before he would let one get a word in edgeways; then there was nothing he would not do to try and help. His tongue sometimes tripped him up; but his kindness and innate delicacy invariably pulled him through.

As he was helping him on with his coat, Tracey asked Middleton if he knew of an easy, well-mannered hack; he only wanted it for light work such as riding about the estate, and a lady's hack would suit him down to the ground.

"What?" blurted out Middleton, who could see as far through a stone wall as most persons. "For that pretty little girl in there? Might do worse—a thousand times worse for yourself, than make her——"

“Oh! shut up!” broke in Tracey. “You oughtn’t to drag a girl’s name into the conversation, Middleton.”

“Of course not! Damned bad form!” answered the M.F.H. heartily. “I’m beastly sorry—but she’s a delightful girl! See? You oughtn’t to have let her shoot in the dusk though. Saw somethin’ movin’ and loosed off; she’s too young to think ‘Is it a rabbit?’ By Gad! I’m glad to have you back, old chap. I’ll let you know about the horse. See?”

But, alas for his penitence! As Middleton drove down the drive, he chuckled to himself: “Gad!” he chuckled. “Hooked at last—hope he’ll pull it off. Damned nice girl!” And, from simple force of habit, he chuckled: “See?”

Middleton’s the same as ever, only older,” remarked Tracey as he re-entered the drawing-room.

“If you must go, Colonel, you’ll have a whisky-and-soda first. I’m sure Miss Standish won’t mind us smoking.” He opened a bottle of soda-water and fetched a cigar-case from the writing-table. “It’s strange,” he remarked, lighting a match for the Colonel, “that the tongue is the only part of the human machinery which never wears out.”

He hunted out some sort of a wrap for Betty, and insisted that she should wear it; and he strolled as

far as the bridge with his guests, arranging that they should inspect the site of the lake with him on the following morning.

"I've enjoyed my day awfully, Mr. Tracey," said Betty, as they separated. "I hope I haven't bored you?"

"Everything that happened is worth entering," answered he, showing a corner of the lace handkerchief.

"Whatever are you people drivin' at?" inquired Colonel Standish.

"He was only telling me that he is going to enter all about the lake and things in his journal, dad," explained his daughter.

As Tracey walked up the drive he felt his pocket to make sure that the handkerchief was really there, and that he had not dropped it.

CHAPTER XII

THE COLONEL INTERVENES

ALTHOUGH Tracey's idea of the "mill-dam" had originated merely in a desire to please Betty, it supplied a far better plan of campaign than his original scheme of persuading her to shoot, fish, ride, and walk with him; for Betty was too clever not to have seen through his excuses, too honest to have allowed him to fall in love with her unless she meant to return his love, and too honourable to risk knowingly the loss of her own heart whilst she was engaged to Tom Courtenay. Besides, although the inception of the pond might have sprung from a wish to please Betty, further consideration showed that it would certainly improve the value of the property, and a sense of duty added that it would provide a winter's work for those who needed employment. So John threw himself into the scheme with energy, the making of the lake became Tracey's "work," and Betty saw him at his best.

What could be more natural than that John and Betty should enter into a sort of partnership—he the utilitarian overseer, she the æsthetical adviser?

For, if he was the father of the mill-pond, she was the mother of the lake; and, although Betty had her At Homes and tennis-parties and John had to slip back into his place in the County, her mornings were free, and so were his, and the lake belonged to both of them.

This does not mean that Colonel Standish was ignored. It was the Colonel who suggested that a man in the I.C.S., who had been invalided home after some ten years' service in the Irrigation Department, should be engaged as engineer—a man who had learnt to treat any kind of soil and handle every kind of river; it was the Colonel who suggested that both road and bridge belonged to the County Authorities, and that plans should be sent in before ever a sod was touched; it was the Colonel who showed John how to approach and propitiate the County Surveyor; and lastly, it was the Colonel who had the tact to develop chronic rheumatism in his lower limbs as an excuse to leave John alone with Betty.

Each morning the procedure was the same: the three would meet near the bridge, inspect the strengthening of the embankment with concrete and granite, and talk over the developments. Then Colonel Standish would complain of stiffness, and

stop for a gossip with the engineer if he were present, or hobble home if he were absent, whilst John and Betty strolled on to examine the work at the top of the lake. It was very important, this work at the lake-head; for not only had trenches to be sunk as guides to the depth of excavation, but John and Betty had also to determine how far the lake should be cut into the hillside, and this was an artistic problem which needed much deliberation.

During these walks Peter acted as chaperon, and it was really extraordinary how the puppy's manners were improving. From the first, he had clearly regarded Tracey as his natural master; but whether he had come to regard Betty as someone in whom his master had a kind of vested interest, or whether he was modelling his manners on John's is uncertain; anyhow, he was beginning to behave like a little gentleman.

During these walks to the head of the lake, and back to Coombe Lodge—and the couple did not hurry—John and Betty grew to learn much of each other. The work in hand was serious; the making of the lake would have been sufficiently important to satisfy most persons, but (as John remarked) one could always unmake a lake and restore the meadows to their former appearance; the digging, cut-

ting, and blasting of the hillside, however, were of the last importance, for one could not clap back the sand and stone, as though one were repairing a sand castle. A fine cliff, overlooking a fine lake, would make a fine addition to the Tracey landscape; but a red sandstone cliff, overlooking water-meadows, would not be agreeably impressive.

Now, you will find that an intimacy partakes of the nature of its foundation: a friendship founded on a seaside holiday is as unstable as the sand; a friendship founded on sport is apt to become a lifelong recreation; but an intimacy founded on mutual and important work is as thorough and lasting as the work itself. The reason of this is obvious. The seaside companionship commences with recreation, frivol, and flirting, and when it drifts into personal confidences, these confidences are tinged with the same qualities. The friendship that is founded on work begins seriously, and when the conversation becomes personal, it is because the personal element has assumed more importance than the work itself. Thus John and Betty grew to learn much of each other.

Betty learnt that there were at least three personalities in John Tracey, and that these were tucked away inside one another like Indian puzzles.

There was the outward and visible man, intelligent, courteous to his equals, strict with those under him, and both kind and thoughtful; underneath this—and kept severely in subjection—was a layer of idealism; and below, underlying everything, there was a substratum of firm decision and absolute devotion to duty. The outward man was the result of John's consistent practice of his ethics; the vein of idealism rendered him human and, when he understood, sympathetic; the substratum made him very certain in his opinions and unlikely to consult others.

I do not mean that Betty analysed Tracey; but she found that there was a certain Mr. Tracey whom she had known from the beginning, and who was always the same. As she grew to know him better, his idealism would sometimes crop up in the most pleasant way; and, every now and again, she would stumble across a firmness which almost amounted to obstinacy, and which almost frightened her.

John learnt that the changing moods and occasional impudences which had marked the Betty of his first acquaintance, were but the ripples on the surface, and that the real Betty was clear and fresh and deep as Lake Biwa; that she was earnest, with-

out being serious, and that she was adorable from crown to sole.

She told him, bit by bit, everything about herself, that is to say, everything except her engagement to Tom Courtenay; but since her promise bound her to keep this matter private, and since every woman must be allowed one secret, and since one reservation must be regarded as a sort of exception to prove the rule of unreserved frankness, she must be considered to have told him all about herself.

But it must be remembered, in justice to Betty, that Courtenay was a bad letter-writer, that the announcement of their engagement was far away and did not seem to be growing any nearer, and that the lake and the different things which Tracey had told her about himself (in friendship, mind you, and untinged with flirtation) occupied her thoughts.

She should not have allowed Tracey to occupy her thoughts——? Think——! A nice man who had lost all belief in Christianity; a good woman, not more religious than most girls of her class, but with that inborn faith and innate reverence which is the natural gift of every good woman. Under such circumstances could any girl help planning to become a Good Influence? Besides, he interested her, and was honestly interested in all she talked

about. He was absolutely indifferent to other girls, and yet his face always brightened when she appeared. He had been banished from Tracey, and she had been the first person of his own rank to welcome him home. Leaving the lake, and the ♂ and ♀ electrons out of the case, Betty would have been detestable if she had not thought a great deal about John Tracey.

If, after the first fortnight, it occurred to Betty that there was more in John's behaviour than mere, ordinary friendship, if it occurred to her that she looked forward to these mornings more than she looked forward to the rest of the day—Betty was not a fool—she put such thoughts from her. When we are very happy in the present, don't we all do the same?

It was Wednesday, September the twenty-third, and John and Betty had known each other for nearly three weeks, when Colonel Standish was overtaken by an attack of liver. This attack was the immediate result of the Colonel's diplomatic rheumatism and the consequent lack of his accustomed exercise, and although it was not severe, it made him fussy and irritable. He had been as far as the dam, and after he had seen John and Betty start off on their tour of inspection he had hobbled

home, for his rheumatism was really rather bad this morning. He had attempted to read the paper until the columns began to run into one another; he had lit a cigar, but the tobacco had tasted vile; he had tried the remedy of brandy-and-water, but the cognac had only made him feel somewhat sick. Then Betty came in looking aggressively fit.

"Congratulate me, dad!" said she with triumph. "I've won!"

"Won what?" he inquired.

"Why? Of course—the summer-house."

For the last fortnight, she and John had quarrelled over the summer-house which was to be built on the top of the cliff, overlooking the lake—Betty urging that, since most of the English summer was really a modified winter, the house should take the form of a low, thatched cottage with a wide veranda, large windows, and a big fireplace. And that morning John had acknowledged that she was in the right.

"Well," grunted the Colonel, "I suppose you're the one who'll use it most." Then he realised what he had said, and could have bitten his tongue off.

"What do you mean, dad?" asked Betty, growing scarlet. Only the night before, Colonel Standish

had made a somewhat similar innuendo, and wriggled out of it.

"A girl must know somethin' about summer-houses," he explained vaguely, wishing that his bilious attack had gone and that his head was a little clearer.

"Why did you say I'd use it most?" she asked relentlessly.

"I suppose they'll take the most of the winter to make the pond—won't they? And you'll sit in the summer-house whilst Tracey's talkin' to the men?"

It was a very lame excuse, especially as the summer-house would not be commenced until the lake was finished, and Betty began to smooth out her gloves carefully. When one has been living in a fool's paradise, built over a powder magazine, a mere spark is enough to clear away illusions; and she saw why Tracey, who ignored other girls, had not been indifferent to her; and she saw (it made the blood sing in her ears) that she was not indifferent to him. Also, she saw in a flash that there was only one honourable course for an honourable girl to follow.

"I don't think that was what you meant," she said, evenly; for it is in the nature of every woman

to face a serious situation, and although she may grow almost hysterical over small matters, she will face a grave situation calmly and bravely.

The Colonel moistened his lips, but remained silent.

"I think you meant that Mr. Tracey was in love with me."

The C.O. could not think what he should say. Considering that Tracey had told him his feelings in confidence, Colonel Standish had placed himself in a very false position.

"I had better tell you, dad, that I'm engaged to Tom."

"What!"

"That I'm engaged to Tom Courtenay, dad." Her voice was perfectly colourless, and she kept on smoothing her gloves.

"Good God!" said the Colonel, and there was silence.

"If you don't leave off fidgiting with those gloves, you'll drive me crazy!" said the Colonel. And then there was complete silence.

It was not a pleasant story for a father to tell his daughter—there was no hint of immorality in it, only of extravagance; but just where an engaged man ought to have pulled himself together and tried

to put his affairs straight, Courtenay had plunged still more wildly. The Colonel repeated no hearsay, he only stated such facts as came to his personal knowledge; he was one of the boy's trustees until his twenty-fifth birthday, and he had notices of mortgages on the reversionary interest, life-assurance assignments, and private inquiries from gentlemen who signed their letters with such names as "Lewis," "Cowen," and "Rosen-something." He told his facts with alternate bursts of indignation and sympathy, and he ended: "He must have proposed just after I told him he was ruinin' himself! The—the—the—scoundrel!" Then his temporary ailment got the mastery, and he had to make an excuse and hurry from the room.

He came back some twenty minutes later to find Betty, very white and exceedingly resolute, still waiting for him. She had been so entirely wrapped up in the serious problem before her, that she had hardly noticed her father's indisposition.

"Dad," she began, "I know that Tom's not behaved well, but I think I ought to give him a chance of explaining things."

"If he hasn't economised since he asked you to marry him," said the Colonel, helping himself to some weak brandy-and-water, "he never will. I've

seen too much to let my daughter marry a spend-thrift."

"I know all that, dad," she answered gravely—she had been brought up in the Service, and knew the utter hopelessness of wastrels—"but he ought to have a chance."

"I shall never consent to the engagement," he retorted with some fervour. "And—I don't think you've treated me very well, Betty."

"I've been beastly!" she cried, kneeling beside him. "I've been beastly—and—you've been so awfully good to me—and——"

The Colonel could feel her trembling, as he put his arms round her.

"You've been everything to me, dad," she sobbed, "—and—I'm—so—sorry."

"Hush!" he said, stroking her cheek.

"No! I won't hush! I ought to have made Tom tell you! I ought never to have promised not to tell you!"

"Poor little girl," said the Colonel, gently; and Betty cuddled up to him.

"Are you——" he asked, when Betty seemed more composed. "I don't know how to put it—but were you very much in love with Courtenay?" He had been doing some hard thinking. Tracey

appeared as a haven of rest for his daughter after Courtenay, and it would be a thousand pities if she refused him out of sentiment towards this impossible youth. Besides, he was sufficiently wise to guess that Betty's wound was not very deep.

"I—don't—know," whispered Betty.

He smiled at her honesty. "Are you sure he cares for you?" he asked. Then he added what he had said to Tracey: "You know you are very pretty, Betty, and——"

"Oh! He cares—but—he—didn't care enough to economise," she added hopelessly.

He wondered if he should give her a hint about Tracey, for he did not want her to be caught napping, lest she might refuse him right off; but he came to the conclusion that he had interfered enough already. "Well," he said, "you'll write to Tom?"

"I'll go and write now," she answered.

CHAPTER XIII

BETWEEN TWO FIRES

VERY few women understand that the man who is in financial difficulties cannot afford to economise. A man who has a balance at his bank, or a man who has just passed through the bankruptcy court—thus do extremes meet—can afford to cut down expenses; but let one who is hard up start selling his horses or reducing his establishment, and his creditors swoop down on him like a flock of vultures.

It is true that Tom Courtenay ought to have taken the Colonel's Christmas lecture to heart. It is true that he might have succeeded in saving something from the coming wreck; but if Betty had realised that Courtenay's apparent extravagance, since their engagement, had in reality been a wild endeavour to recoup some of his previous losses, and that his tandem and polo ponies had been kept to save appearances, she would have been less bitterly disappointed. As it was, she wrote with a very sad heart:

"DEAREST TOM," she began, "I had to tell dad about our engagement this morning, and he has

told me something that has upset me awfully. Can it be really true that you have spent all your capital since our engagement, and that you will have nothing left except your pay? I can hardly believe it!

“Why—I’ve managed to save nearly twelve pounds out of my wretched little dress allowance and the few——”

This last sentence sounded rather mean, so she tore up the letter and began over again:

“DEAREST TOM,—I had to tell dad about our engagement this morning. I will explain why when we meet—it is too long for a letter.

“You remember our talk last Christmas, after you asked me to marry you. You said we’d be poor—and I told you I did not mind it—and you said that you would economise ‘like blazes’—those were the exact words you used—and that when you had put things straight we’d have between one hundred and fifty and two hundred beside your pay—and you asked me not to tell dad until you had got your affairs straight.

“Now I hear that you have run through everything! If dad was not so careful about what he says I should hardly believe it. The worst of it is that you don’t seem to have given up anything—your ponies or anything. If you do not care enough about me now—if you let everything slide and keep on spending money like this—what would

it be like when we were married! You know that I'm not mercenary, and I would not have minded if it had not been your fault. I would not have minded so much if you had only fooled away the money—but you don't seem to have given up anything for me. How can I trust you, Tom?

"You must not think I don't care. I care awfully—and don't think that I shan't listen to your explanations.

"Ever your loving

"BETTY."

A tear rolled down and fell flop on the letter, and as she was not the sort of girl to punctuate her letters with tear-drops, she had to write it all over again. Then she remembered that John Tracey was coming over to tea that afternoon, so she had to write a most unconvincing note, pleading a headache, and send it over by a servant. Then she had to bathe her eyes, and make a pretence of eating some lunch. Then she was able to go up to her room, lock the door, and give way to her feelings.

There was Tom Courtenay who had behaved in such a way that her father could assert that he was not fit to marry her. There was Mr. Tracey who had behaved in such a way, and whom she had allowed to behave in such a way, that her father

unthinkingly hinted at their marriage. It was hateful!—hateful!

It was no good to pretend that she had not encouraged Mr. Tracey. She had not actually—well—flirted with him; and, for the matter of that, he had not tried to flirt with her; but is there not something which is still more engaging than flirtation? What was it that Mrs. Weybridge—the smart Mrs. Weybridge—had said only last spring? “If a woman lets a man talk to her about herself, he may want to make love to her; but if she takes an interest in his work and encourages him to talk about himself, he will worship her.” It was true that she had not tried to attract him, and that she had encouraged him to talk about himself simply because he interested her; but that was no excuse—she ought to have understood!

Had she not seen Mr. Tracey’s expression whenever he met her? Nay more, when she knew that she was going to meet him, had she not always looked forward to seeing a sort—well—a sort of happy look come into his face? She felt her cheeks growing hot.

And Mr. Tracey had not said anything to her. He had not even given a hint that he had something to say to her. She was just taking it for

granted that he cared for her—somehow or other, this seemed to make things infinitely worse. And now all her mind was running on Mr. Tracey, and she was not giving poor Tom a single thought!

If only Tom had not behaved so foolishly; if she could only have stuck to her engagement, confessed to Tom, and tried to forget about Mr. Tracey! But now she could see no chance of marrying Tom (and to tell the truth she was grateful for this mercy), and she never, never, never wanted to meet Mr. Tracey again.

Betty was feeling the desolation and craving for sympathy which sometimes comes to motherless girls, when there was a tap at her door, and the maid told her that Colonel Standish wished to see her in his study.

“Now, sit you here, Miss Standish,” said the Colonel, pulling round one of the easy chairs by the fire, so that its back was towards the light. “I couldn’t eat any lunch, and I want something; so I’ve had some tea brought in, and I’m going to prescribe for you.” He poured out a cup of amazingly strong tea, adding very little milk and sugar.

“Ever heard of the whitaroo?” inquired the Colonel, drawing on his higher imagination.

“No,” answered Betty with a wintry smile.

"The whitaroo's a sort of bush rabbit," he explained laboriously. "If you take it into the open, and put it down, it'll run round and round after itself until it drops. The natives say that it's huntin' itself."

"Yes?" said Betty.

"You've got into a tangle, little girl; and your thoughts will only keep on runnin' round till you drop. I'm going to tuck you up and send you off to sleep, Betty." He refilled her cup with the amazing tea. "Might think it will keep you awake," he remarked; "but it'll send you off like a top."

She took the cup of tea, stroking his hand as she took it. This was the sympathy she craved for.

"This muddle has been as much my fault as anyone's," remarked Colonel Standish, looking embarrassed. "I could see that Tracey had taken to you, and you seemed to like him, and I did my best to throw you together. In fact," he confessed, "I shammed rheumatism a bit."

Betty smiled. It was comforting to hear that the tangle was not all her fault.

"And now I'm paid out with an attack of liver," continued the Colonel, following up his success.

"You dear!" said Betty.

"My little girl's got to go slow and take things

easy until she hears from Courtenay," he concluded. "You can't do anything until you have an answer to your letter, Betty; and it's no good plannin' ahead."

"And then?" inquired she.

"I've had enough of interferin'," replied Colonel Standish, firmly; but he could not help one last intervention. "I'll tell you one thing, Betty," he said gravely: "when a woman feels that she's let herself get a trifle too friendly with a man—I mean a little more friendly than she meant to—she always wants to take it out of him—God knows why. She wants—hum—wants to send him packin'."

"Y-e-s," she answered slowly. Her father had exactly described her own feelings.

"Be gentle with Tracey. He's an awful decent chap."

"Y-e-s," answered Betty.

He tucked her up, in spite of her protests, for Colonel Standish believed that rest and the equivalent to a Turkish bath are the best remedies for troubles, and went over to his writing-table. There was a gentle scratch, scratch of his pen; it grew fainter and fainter; and then John Tracey showed her the lace handkerchief as they walked up the valley, and she knew that she trusted him and that

the fox was not really dead; and they walked on and on until the cliff at the end of the valley came sliding down with a bright light, and Betty found that the servant had brought in the lamp and that it was time to dress for dinner.

Now, although some proverbs are mere foolish platitudes, other proverbs, which are founded on cumulative experience, are wisdom: "It never rains, but it pours," and "Speak of the devil, and he is sure to appear"—thus, if you be moved to speak of Jones to-day, you are certain to hear of, and from, Jones to-morrow. Possibly, the thought-energy which makes Brown write to you of Jones, and Jones write to you of himself, may have caused some kind of thought-transfer.

Anyhow, whilst Betty and the Colonel were talking about Courtenay's money troubles, two letters concerning Courtenay's affairs were on their way. The first was a letter from Postlethwaite to Tracey, which was delivered that morning; the second was addressed to Betty, and since this second letter was not delivered until the morrow, it may be left for the morrow.

The letter from St. John Postlethwaite ran as follows:

"DEAR OLD CHAP,—You remember poor Courtenay of the Rifles—I believe he used to be rather a friend of yours. His son has got himself into the deuce of a mess, and has asked me to help him.

"The boy, who is in the Lowland Light Infantry, seems to have mortgaged and otherwise frittered away a comfortable little fortune, and has ended with a wild plunge at Manchester. The result is that he will have to find about £300 to settle his bets before Monday, or he'll have to send in his papers.

"Young Courtenay is a good boy at heart, and, as he honestly intends to pull himself together, I am doing what I can to help him; but I can't place my hands on the money at once. Do you mind sending him a cheque for £300, and I will settle with you in about a fortnight.

"He has promised to lay the matter before his C.O., and ask for advice. This seems the best way to put him straight, and it always pays to confide in one's Colonel—so perhaps you had better send the money direct to the C.O.

"Etc., etc."

Unfortunately Postlethwaite neglected to mention that the Commanding Officer of the L.L.I. was an intimate friend of his. He also forgot to mention the officer's name and where the regiment was stationed.

John Tracey read through the letter twice. Tom Courtenay's father had been quite a friend of his, and he would do anything to oblige Postlethwaite; besides Betty had spoken about the boy a good many times and seemed to take an interest in him; so Tracey drew out a cheque for £400, payable to Thomas Courtenay or Bearer (the extra hundred might come in useful) and enclosed it in a letter to the Colonel. He mentioned that he had heard, from a friend of Courtenay's, that the boy was going to consult his C.O. about some money difficulties, and that as he was an old friend of Courtenay's father he joined in the enclosed cheque. He searched in vain for an Army List, and placed the letter on the mantelpiece until he could learn the address. He also wrote to Postlethwaite, telling him what he had done, and insisting on going halves. Then he received Betty's note, and had plenty to think about.

It was not that he was upset at Betty's headache, for any healthy girl may have an occasional headache. It was not that he was disappointed at not seeing her during the afternoon; but there was a tone about Betty's letter that distressed him; for instance, Betty had written "I regret to say," instead of "I am sorry to say," and altogether the

letter read as though she had not wished him to come over that afternoon, and was making an excuse to put him off.

The letter was so unlike the warm-hearted, friendly Betty of his acquaintance that, adding the epistle to the unexpected headache, he could not help concluding that something had upset her. As there had been nothing in their morning's conversation that could possibly have offended the girl, he was forced to believe that some echo of gossip had reached her.

However, he could do nothing until the next day, and he had to get through a restless and wretched evening as best he could.

CHAPTER XIV

BY THE OTTER

As might have been expected, neither Betty nor John slept much that night.

Betty had lain awake, tormenting herself with Courtenay's perfidy, and wondering how she could avoid being alone with Tracey; whilst John had tossed to and fro, wondering what had so suddenly come between him and Betty, and resolving to force the game and come to an immediate understanding.

Consequently, both rose when dawn was greying the sky, and both went down to listen to the Song of Perfect Consolation, which is the babble of the river. Moved by a similar impulse, both walked down to the pool where they had first met.

Now I do not pretend to know why Betty whistled Peter, and made this particular spot the object of her walk—perhaps it was only because the path from Coombe Lodge led down to the pool of the speckled Thomas; but I do know that John let out a couple of spaniels, and went down to Thomas' pool because it was the place where he had first met Betty.

John had further to go; Betty had a mass of back hair to arrange; therefore they reached the pool simultaneously.

“Good-morning, Miss Standish!” shouted John. “How’s the headache? I’m coming over!”

“Please don’t!” shouted back Betty, above the sound of the waters. “You’ll get awfully wet, besides—— Oh! don’t,” she shouted, as John stepped down the bank. “I’ll meet you at the bridge.” She felt that it would be much better to meet Tracey on the bridge, where labourers would be passing to their work, than to meet him in the water-meadows.

He laughed joyfully, and splashed into the water, the dogs splashing in after him.

“How’s the headache?” he repeated, wading up to the bank.

She held out her hands to him, for the bank was steep and she could not be ungracious to him.

“How tired you look!” said he, scrambling on to the bank, and still holding her hands.

“Which means—that I’m looking plain,” said she, looking down.

“Which means that my little lady is looking her sweetest,” he answered, still holding her hands.

“Look at me, Betty.”

She looked up, and smiled sadly.

The same God Who created the world fresh and new, recreates the world each morning; and those who live a natural life find that their thoughts are clearer and their motives purer in the early morning than they are later in the day. Anything that Betty had planned to say overnight was forgotten, and she was acting on the inspiration and impulse of the moment. She knew that John was going to propose, and she was glad that he was going to propose, because she meant to tell him the exact truth. She loosed her hands, and the two walked slowly towards the bridge.

"I have something to say," began John.

Betty nodded her head.

He had made up his mind to win her, from the first; but now that he was coming to the point, he experienced both diffidence and compunction. Betty seemed miles too good for him.

"I'm thirty-five and you're only twenty," he remarked, watching her.

"Twenty-one," corrected Betty, softly.

"That makes me fourteen years older than you—but it isn't that—at least, that doesn't matter." He thought a moment how to express himself. "I expect you think you know me?"

"I've seen a good deal of you—lately," she answered shyly.

"Well—you've seen me at my best—and what's more, you've only seen me at my best. I'm a moody sort of a brute, sometimes—I dwell on things. And—we're an awfully unlucky family to marry into." He stood still and faced her.

"Betty," he said, "I love you, and I've loved you since the first."

She wanted to answer him, but she could think of nothing to say.

"Well?" he asked.

He stood quite still, without even moving his hands, until she longed to scream.

"Have you nothing to say?" he asked. It was a strange wooing, almost uncouth; but when a man makes love gracefully, he has had previous experience, or else his feelings are not very deeply touched.

"I love you. Don't you understand? I love you." But still she was speechless.

"Do you care for me?" he asked.

Then Betty found words. "I do care—but—I never thought anything until yesterday. I ought to have known—but I never let myself think until yesterday. I do care—and—it's no good——"

He began to dig up a thistle with his walking-stick, and she watched him.

"Then—it's no good?" he said, drawing himself up.

"Oh! please go on digging—you make it so difficult for me. I can't explain—and——"

"Is there anyone else?" he asked.

"Yes—and—no," she answered.

He said nothing, for what on earth could he say; it was like tilting against a feather-bed. Then he looked at Betty (do what she would, Betty could not keep the tears out of her eyes) and a wave of great pity came over him.

"Look here, Miss Standish"—he had returned more to his old manner with her—"your answer means everything to me, and I've let myself get too—I don't know exactly what—too earnest. At any rate, we both care, and I'm sorry I got so earnest." He tucked her right hand into his arm, and began walking towards the bridge. "Now tell me, little girl," said he, stroking her right hand with his left, "have I any chance? If I haven't, don't mind; it isn't your fault."

"I liked you so much," began Betty, "and I liked being your friend, and—I never thought—you understand?"

"Of course," he answered, stroking her hand. "If you'd only thought, you'd have known that I was in love with you; but we just drifted on. It wasn't your fault."

"It was," she insisted. "A girl hasn't any right to let a man devote himself to her, like I've let you, unless——" and she shrugged her shoulders. "All I mean is—that I didn't mean to do it. I just did it because I liked you, and I liked you liking me."

They walked on some thirty yards in silence. "Have I the ghost of a chance?" asked John. "If not, it won't make any difference."

She stood still and withdrew her hand from his arm, for they were in sight of the bridge. She was not saying in the least what she had intended to say, but she had an overwhelming impulse to show John how much she cared. She could not give him a definite answer until she had heard from Courtenay, but she longed to give him his answer, and she had but little doubt what that answer would be. "Can you wait till the day after to-morrow?" she whispered.

"I can wait just as long as you like," he said, smiling. If her answer should have to be "No," he did not mean her to suffer more than he could

help. "And I want you to understand one thing," he continued. "I fell in love with you straight away. This last fortnight hasn't made any difference to me. You have absolutely nothing to reproach yourself with."

"Yes," she whispered. She was longing to give him his answer, and now she had no doubt what that answer would be.

"If I'd found that you were a married woman when I brought you over the handkerchief, I should have been just as much in love with you as I am now," he continued. "Of course, I shouldn't have shown you that I cared, but I should have loved you all the same. It hasn't been my fault, or your fault, or anyone's fault. It's been fate. You've absolutely nothing to reproach yourself with. Do you understand?"

She understood his unselfishness, and she also understood that she could not bear to keep him in uncertainty. "I—think so," she said—but the tone of her voice said more, and her eyes said most of all.

"I'm glad!" he answered, looking down instead of looking where he ought to have looked.

The girl felt a chill; for no girl can do more than hint at the initiative, and when a girl hints at a

surrender, and the man fails to notice her hint, she is humiliated.

Unfortunately, John Tracey was so intent on doing his duty towards Betty, and so much wrapped up in showing her that she had no cause for self-reproach, that he overlooked Betty herself. Instead of pressing her for an explanation as he ought to have done, instead of putting his arm round her as a wiser man would have done, he started an oration. It was a very sincere oration, commencing with "I love you too much to worry you, Betty," and ending with a very honest statement of a very beautiful affection; but there are times when actions are golden, and words are almost an insult.

As Tracey spoke, Betty felt herself getting colder and colder; she had been ready to yield, and he had not noticed it. Then she caught sight of Peter and burst into hysterical laughter.

"Look!" she cried, for there was Peter sitting up and watching them intently. The other two spaniels had gone off pottering along the river bank, as spaniels will; but Peter had remained to gaze with absorbed interest.

"I've bungled!" thought Tracey to himself; but how he had bungled, he could not exactly see.

CHAPTER XV

A SMALL RED SPANIEL

AN application of cold water to the eyes, a touch of eau-de-Cologne to the forehead, removed all trace of Betty's emotions, and she came down to breakfast looking pale and tired, but otherwise normal. She kissed her father, poured out his coffee, and proceeded to turn over the small pile of letters that lay beside her plate. The first one that caught her eye was addressed in Tom Courtenay's bold handwriting.

Betty read her letter through, gulped down some coffee and read it through again more carefully. "I think you ought to see this, dad," she said, with a catch in her voice.

"Read it aloud," suggested the Colonel, helping himself to kidneys.

"DARLING OLD BETTY," she began, "I'm afraid this will be rather upsetting——"

She passed the letter across the breakfast-table. "I can't read it aloud," she said. "It's from Tom,

and"—she tried to smile—"it is rather upsetting."

Colonel Standish fumbled for his eyeglasses and continued:

"But I am in a beastly hole and I don't see my way out of it unless you can suggest something. I got into debt when I first joined the regiment, borrowed money, speculated, and generally made an ass of myself. The long and short of it is that after we got engaged I had a regular flutter to try and get back what I had dropped, and unless I can raise three hundred by Monday I shall have to send in my papers. I saw Postlethwaite and asked him if he could help me. He said he would do what he could, but I have heard nothing more from him, and I must find the money at once."

"Don't read the rest aloud, dad," broke in Betty. "I can't quite stand it."

"I'm at my wits' end, old girl," continued the Colonel to himself, "and I don't see how I can possibly raise the money. If I can only pull through this, I shall start reading for the Staff College and try and get a billet in India, and then you can come out to me. But I can't get the money unless you can suggest something. You understand I should not worry you unless I was at my wits' end."

"You seem to be great friends with Tracey" ("Whew!" whistled the Colonel), "at least so I

gather from your letters, and he used to be a great friend of my father's. If he would only lend me £300 until I can straighten things out, I would pay it back as soon as ever I could—that is in a few weeks.

“I hardly like to suggest this, but I can't think of anything else. If you could only sound Tracey and explain things. You might even read him my letter, leaving out the bit about our engagement. If he won't find the money I'm gone in. Three hundred would not matter to him, and I'd pay it back almost at once.

“I would write to him myself, but it would be so awfully difficult to explain everything and my head is feeling awfully stupid.”

“You needn't read any more, dad,” remarked Betty, as the Colonel turned over the last page. “It's—it's only sentiment,” she added bitterly.

Giving one glance at his daughter's face, Colonel Standish handed back the letter and kept silence. When Colonel Standish, D.S.O., has to answer for his life, this smothering of a fiery temper for Betty's sake will count in his favour.

“I suppose this ends it,” said the Colonel, pushing away his plate and taking out his cigar-case. Betty had given up any pretence of eating some time before.

"I suppose so," she assented.

"You won't understand all I mean, Betty; but you'll understand enough for practical purposes." He inhaled a lungful of smoke, as though his cigar were only a cigarette. "Young Courtenay's engaged to you, and he wants you to use your influence with Tracey to borrow money—Tracey's a decent chap—well and good. You marry him and go to India, and he'll expect you to use your influence with the gods at Simla to get him a billet—rakish old general—pretty girl—billet for her husband—*quid pro quo*—damn!" he ended.

"I—think—I—know what you mean, dad."

"I'm quite sure you don't," he answered, "at least not all that I mean. But you understand that no honourable man can ask favours from other men through a pretty wife. Tracey wouldn't have thought of doing it."

He roused himself and went round to Betty. This letter had taken the starch out of him. It opened such awful possibilities to a man who knew India. He realised that he was getting on in life, and he longed to feel that his daughter was safely provided for. "I can't tell you how sorry I am for you, Kiddie," he said, putting his arm round her neck. "I'm gettin' an old man—mind, I

shan't own it to-morrow—and I want to leave my daughter happy. You're the dickens of a lot to me, Betty."

"I met Mr. Tracey—this morning," she whispered.

The Colonel stroked her hair sympathetically.

"And—I said I'd tell him the day after to-morrow."

"Please God you'll say 'yes'!" The Colonel straightened himself, for the news made him feel almost young again.

"I—think so," whispered Betty.

"Go for a walk! Thank God! Go for a walk, Betty," said the Colonel, excitedly. "You want fresh air to blow away the cobwebs. Go up on Coombe Downs, and take Peter with you; and, mind, you're not to think about anything until you come back. Then we'll have a stroll together."

He caught her up, kissed her, and bundled her out of the room. Then he rang for a small glass of brandy, lit a fresh cigar, and muttered: "Thank God!"

Now Coombe Downs were created when the world was young, great rolling downs covered with heath and crowned with pine-trees, catching the sea breezes and carrying the high road to Dorchester.

No healthy headache in the world could live one hour on Coombe Downs. So when, at the end of one hour, Betty seated herself on the stump of a fallen pine-tree, she was herself again.

She whistled to Peter, and when the spaniel put his paws on her lap and looked up in her face, she began to talk to him as wise girls talk to spaniels and mothers talk to their babies.

"I've been engaged to a man who's behaved awfully badly, Peter," said she, gravely. The dog licked her hand, because he could see that his mistress was troubled. "He has run through *all* his money, Peter, and now he wants me to borrow more from Mr. Tracey. Isn't it *horrid*?" Peter gave a low growl. He was probably inspired by the tone of Betty's voice.

"Shall I throw him over, Peter, and marry your master? He wants me to." The puppy wagged the stump of a tail. "Then you and I and Mr. Tracey and all the other little red spaniels will make a sort of happy family," she continued.

"Now, I want to talk to you really seriously, Peter, because you're the only person I can trust absolutely." Betty picked up the dog and sat him upright on her knee.

"Now, if I gave Tom his *cong  * and married

Mr. Tracey, do you think we'd be happy together, you and I and Mr. Tracey and all the other little red spaniels and Peter the peacock?" Betty knew that she was talking nonsense, but Peter licked her chin in a most reassuring way.

She stroked him gently, and Peter gradually settled himself for a nap, whilst Betty sank into a deep meditation. She had to determine her life, once and for all.

She could not marry Tom Courtenay, that was certain. She could not possibly marry a man who asked her to borrow money from another man with whom she was friendly. Her own instinct told her this even more strongly than her father's experience. She would write and break off the engagement the moment she got home.

Then, what should she say to Mr. Tracey? She like him immensely. She respected him. She thought that she would be happy with him. But did she love him? That was the question. She blushed to herself, and smiled at herself, for had not she half-expected him to kiss her down by the river, when she had told him that she understood? And, to face the matter honestly—she could not afford to make a second mistake, and again engage herself to a wrong man—had not she been mortified be-

cause he had not kissed her? Why should she feel ashamed? No man could love a girl more desperately and more delicately than he loved her.

Her face went into wicked dimples. He loved her, and she loved him, and she would make him pay for his diffidence after she had accepted him.

"Peter! Peter! I'll marry your master," she said, shaking the puppy; and Peter, waking up, wagged his tail wildly.

"We'll try to be good to him; and he'll be awfully good to us, Peter."

"He will!" wagged Peter.

"He'll be kind to you and me and the peacock and all the little red spaniels, Peter."

"Infernally kind!" wagged Peter.

"And I think I shall love him, Peter, just as much as he loves you and me."

The puppy jumped down, and ran round Betty, barking.

"Now let us look at things squarely in the face, you and I, Peter." Peter sat down before her, lolling out his tongue.

"I don't think I could have been very much in love with Tom, nor he with me: do you, doggikins? Because, if he had been very much in love with

me, he wouldn't have wasted his money, and if I'd been very much in love with him I should be heart-broken. I expect a lot of it was sentiment; don't you, wee red doggie?"

"Love's young dream," looked Peter.

"Exactly!" said Betty.

For some reason or other, the little red dog held up one paw for Betty to take.

"Between you and me and this pine log, Peter, don't you think that Mr. Tracey was a little foolish this morning? I saw you looking, and I knew what you thought. He might have——" and she kissed the top of Peter's head. "I believe you want me to marry Mr. Tracey, Peter."

"He's awfully good to spaniels," looked Peter.

"And you think he'll be good to Betty Standish?" asked she.

"I saw him hold your hand this morning," smiled Peter.

"Hush!" said Betty.

"And if you'll only learn to retrieve," blinked Peter with confidence, "and hunt out ground game, he'll pat your head and stroke your back. You've no idea how nice it is to have your head patted, Betty."

"Oh! you bad little dog!" she cried, and

catching him up in her arms, she ran down the hill, to Peter's huge delight.

Making a detour so as to avoid Coombe Ottery, where half the country-side would be shopping, Betty reached home without meeting anyone; and then, as she turned into the drive, she almost ran into John Tracey.

"Don't look surprised. I only walked over to leave some partridges," he explained.

"But I thought——" said she, chin in air. She was all the woman now, confident in both herself and him.

"Oh! I'm playing the game all right," he answered, smiling. "I didn't even ask after you. You won't see anything of me till the day after to-morrow."

"Since we have met," she suggested—for she could not help noticing that he was looking worn—"you might see me up the drive."

They walked together without conversation, until they reached the hall-door.

"If I may give some advice, Mr. Tracey," said Betty, holding out her hand, "and if you should happen to go for a walk before breakfast to-morrow——"

"Yes?" said John.

“Don’t wade the river, but go round by the bridge.” She freed her hand, and opened the hall-door. “And,” continued she, stepping into the house, “try Thomas’ pool.”

“But——” stammered John Tracey.

She flashed a smile at him, closed the door, and left him dazed.

CHAPTER XVI

AN IMPORTANT LETTER

A LETTER which breaks off an engagement is, under no circumstances, an easy letter to write; but when a girl has to announce, in the same letter, her engagement to another man, the task becomes appalling. The wisest course that a girl could pursue would be (*a*) to state her reason for the termination of the first engagement, (*b*) to make it perfectly clear that she loved the second man far more than ever she loved the first; but this is a counsel of perfection that no maiden could be expected to follow.

Betty's case was further complicated because she could not explain (*a*) the enormity of Tom's offence in asking her to use her personal influence with Tracey so that he might lend Tom the desired money, nor could she explain (*b*) that she had unthinkingly fallen in love with Tracey before she had thought of breaking off her engagement with her first lover; so she wrote:

“ Coombe Lodge, Coombe Ottery.

“ *24th September, 1908.*

“ MY DEAR TOM,—I am not going to say anything about your letter asking me to persuade Mr.

Tracey, with whom you knew that I was very friendly, to lend you the three hundred pounds. If you cannot understand what you have done I cannot explain."

She could not explain! How could she explain such a matter both clearly and delicately? Tom must see for himself.

"This is a frightfully difficult letter to write, for Mr. Tracey has asked me to marry him—of course he knew nothing about our engagement—and I intend to consent."

She bit the end of her pen—it was a frightfully difficult letter to write! It would be brutal to say that she loved John Tracey far more than she could ever have loved Tom Courtenay. He must read between the lines.

"Mr. Tracey is one of the kindest and best men I have ever met, and dad thoroughly approves of the engagement.

"It seems brutal to tell you this, especially now, but it is better that you heard it from me than from anyone else.—Yours ever,

"BETTY L. STANDISH."

In one sense, this letter of Betty's was very tactful, for she neither gushed with one breath and

told Courtenay of her engagement with the next, nor did she refer to her feelings towards Tracey; in another sense, the letter was undiplomatic, for she failed to state any definite reason why she had broken off the engagement, and neglected to hint that her new engagement was one of the heart as well as one of the hand.

By the same post, Tracey sent his cheque for £400 to the Colonel of the Lowland Light Infantry.

The same gods of chance who delight in making zero turn up three consecutive times at Monte Carlo, manage our postal arrangements. They have a keen, though cruel, sense of humour, and they are never so happy as when they can place "horror on horror's head" and pile up the agony.

Betty's letter and Tracey's cheque formed a pretty combination on which to build up false deductions.

CHAPTER XVII

ACROSS THE RIVER

THE morning was cold enough to warrant the use of furs; furs are very becoming—so Betty took out her sables, clothed herself in a warm, home-spun dress, put on a pair of absurdly small shooting boots, and went out to keep her tryst.

So far, the girl had not fallen in love with John Tracey in the same way that he had fallen in love with her. It is true that she cared for him, cared for him sufficiently to make the woman's great venture of faith and take him for better or worse, but she did not yet love him with any of that immense, self-sacrificing affection which her nature was capable of supplying.

Tracey loved the girl as much as a man could love a woman; Betty was like the sleeping princess of the fairy tale, waiting for the kiss which should bring her to life. Few men understand in the least what the first lover's kiss means to a girl—no man can hope to understand the secret in its entirety—and the Intimate School of Lady Novelists is so

deeply engaged in describing illicit amours that it cannot find time to unfold the mystery of love that is both sweet and pure. The first time a girl surrenders herself, to find a lover's arms round her and his lips on hers, is an awakening; and, what is more, it is that particular Sacrament of Nature which changes the girl into the woman, and the friend into the sweetheart. It must be realised that Betty had become engaged to Tom Courtenay on the last day of his long leave, that they had only met for a week in town during the Season, and that the woman in her was still unawakened.

She followed the path through the first meadow; then, just before the pathway curved into the straight, some whim moved her to make a detour and peep through the hedge. John Tracey was waiting for her, standing exactly where she had first met him, with his eyes fixed on the pathway.

He looked strong and big, and she felt glad that she was not engaging herself to a boy. All the same, she found herself bound to hark back and walk down the pathway in a more seemly manner; to pop over the hedge or appear round the gatepost would be as unseemly as to attempt a game of forfeits with a bishop, or to play peep-bo with St. Paul's Cathedral.

Then, as John saw her and hurried forward to meet her, her sense of propriety vanished, and her natural impudence reasserted itself. "You've waded that river again," said she, "and I asked you to come round by the bridge."

"Oh?" he answered, taking her hands and looking at her as if he could eat her.

"Yes! I've a right to scold," she continued. "What shall I do when you get old and rheumatic?" Thus she gave her answer, without keeping him in suspense.

He dropped her hands, and, putting his arm round her shoulders, kissed her tenderly on the forehead.

It was very beautiful, this sealing of the betrothal, and showed a deal of reverence; but unfortunately, the Colonel sometimes kissed his daughter in exactly the same way, and although John's kiss might have shown idealism and devotion, it was not very natural. What would Polly Wilcox, the dairymaid, have thought if her young man had treated her like this? And Polly Wilcox and Betty Standish were "sisters under their skins." All said and done, John's embrace was horribly paternal; and the small demon, who had whispered to Betty on Coombe Downs, that John was too diffident,

repeated his whispering. Thus John Tracey lost his second chance.

His clasp tightened; it loosened; his arm was round her neck, and he had put her head on his shoulder so that her forehead rested against his cheek. Her face flushed a dull scarlet.

Then it flashed on her, all in a second, that she had not heard from Tom Courtenay breaking off their engagement—that he could not even have received her letter—that she was not yet——

Then Tracey's left hand raised her chin, and his lips bent down towards hers—and—with the ghost of a struggle—she whispered: "Don't!" Her chin was released, and her face snuggled back into its place of safety.

"Not—yet—please," she whispered.

She heard John laugh happily. Of course he knew nothing about her engagement to Tom Courtenay, and attributed her reluctance to maidenly shyness.

"It's—so—new——" she whispered, "and I hadn't thought of you like that." She had not the least intention of deceiving him, but her words fitted in with his thoughts.

Then, before she could even say "Oh!" she was caught up in his arms; with a slide and a splash

he was in the water, and she felt herself being carried across the Otter.

"What are you doing?" she cried.

"Carrying you home," he answered. "Now I've got you, I'm going to keep you."

She gave a soft little laugh, for she liked this new phase in John Tracey; it appealed to her.

"I've waited long enough for you!" said Tracey.

"Nearly three weeks?" suggested she.

"No! Years and years!" he insisted gloomily. "I've waited at least seven years since yesterday morning."

"You might have asked my leave, Mr. Tracey. You—don't give me much chance."

"I don't mean to! And how dare you call me 'Mr. Tracey'?"

"What can I call you? You're too—too august to be called 'Jack'; I don't like—I mean—John is so awfully serious."

"I'm afraid it'll have to be John—plain John."

"But you're not plain—John," laughed she. "You're—only homely."

What could he do? He just swung her round as though she were a baby, until his face was above hers.

‘Oh, don’t!’ she pleaded. Perhaps she would not have minded if he had, but she was bound to insist on her scruple about Tom Courtenay.

He laughed down at her. Then he kissed, first one eye, then the other. Then he put her down as carefully as though she were a piece of Venetian glass, for they had crossed the water-meadows and had reached the short, springy turf of the park.

“Let’s take hands and run,” said Betty, joyously, for the New Song was beginning to sing in her heart, the ♀ was becoming conscious of the ♂, and she had crossed the river in more senses than one. They caught hold of hands and ran up the park like a couple of children.

They went up the steps and on to the terrace, then Betty stopped and slipped her hand into Tracey’s arm. “I’m frightened,” she said. “I’m not a bit frightened of you—I never was frightened of you; but when I took you, I took all this. Don’t you see, John, I’m marrying those awful pillars, and the huge house, and all your servants, and all your people, and they’re all Catholics and I know nothing about Catholics.”

“I’ll do everything I can to make things easy for you, sweetheart,” he answered.

“But you can’t! No one can! It will depend

on me whether the household's a happy one, and whether people like coming here. Then there's the chaplain! I suppose he'll live here like he did in your father's time."

"Lord!" ejaculated Tracey, "I'd forgotten all about the chaplain, and the new one comes to-morrow. He comes fresh from the seminary! Do you understand what that means, Betty Standish?"

"No!" smiled Betty.

"Oh! you needn't laugh! You'll find out all about it when you're Mrs. Tracey. It means," he continued grimly, "that he won't have learnt to give and take; that he'll bring the atmosphere of the seminary with him and look at everything from a clerical standpoint; that he'll bring an incongruous element into our household! There's only one way out of it: we shall have to build a church and presbytery at Coombe Ottery."

"I shall have to sign my letters 'Tracey,'" said Betty, dreamily, continuing her previous train of thought—she could trust John to manage about the chaplain. "Shall I sign them 'Elizabeth Lucrezia Tracey,' or 'Betty Tracey'? I think 'Betty Tracey' sounds more important; it's like 'Edward Rex.'"

"You spring the chaplain on me, then you talk

about your signature in the same breath—you're inconsequent, madam! It comes of getting engaged fasting. Let's have some tea, Betty; and I'll walk back with you. I'll even stay to breakfast if you'll ask me."

They went into the dining-room, and John ordered tea.

"I think," said Betty, going from one portrait to another (most of the pictures showed tall, grave men, and several of them were remarkably like John), "that I shall be rather proud of being a Tracey. And," she added demurely, making a cautious move away from her lover, "I am not certain that I shall mind being Mrs. John Tracey. Hush!" she whispered. "Can't you hear those grapes calling us?" She crossed quickly to the breakfast-table.

The man followed her and, throwing himself on an easy chair, put one knee forward and his hand round the girl's waist. Betty clutched at a bunch of black Hamburgs, as a drowning man is said to catch at a straw, and the girl and grapes came backwards gently on to his knee in saucy confusion. They heard the dining-room door opening; there was a violent struggle from Betty, a quick lift from John, and Betty stood firmly on her feet; her sauci-

ness had vanished and her face was like unto an egg—only it was an egg that had been dyed red for Easter. Then Gill came in.

Thus John Tracey wooed and won Betty Standish; and, although there was a certain crudeness and lack of experience in his methods, there was a masterful chivalry that more than atoned; and, although he had sufficient wisdom to refrain from further liberties, he felt Betty's hand steal into his as they walked down the drive.

An engagement ought to be a solemn matter, and John took his betrothal very seriously. He might have lost all his other belief in the Roman Catholic doctrines, but he still retained his belief in marriage, and a betrothal was only one degree less binding than marriage; for if it takes two to make a marriage and the marriage is binding till death, it takes two to make a betrothal and a betrothal can only be dissolved by mutual consent. To state his belief clearly: he held that he and Betty had promised to marry each other; this promise could be dissolved by mutual consent, but, unless Betty loosed John from his promise and he loosed Betty from hers, neither would be free to look (or marry) elsewhere. Those who believe that a man may kiss and pet a girl, and then throw her over with the comfortable

assurance that no nice girl will bring an action for breach of promise, or those who believe that a girl may play fast and loose with a man, will regard this view as a Popish heresy; but those who believe in honour and the keeping of a solemn promise will accept it as only reasonable.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT COOMBE LODGE

THE party at Coombe Lodge had finished their breakfast. Betty had picked up her letters and left the room, ostensibly to see after her household duties, and Tracey and Colonel Standish were left alone. The Colonel had behaved with admirable tact, expressing just sufficient genuine surprise at the news of the engagement (he had not expected Betty to consent until she had heard from Courtenay) and unfeigned pleasure.

"There are two things I want to arrange with you, sir," said John, as the Colonel handed him a box of cigarettes: "the first is the settlement."

"You understand that I shall have next to nothing to leave, Tracey?"

"So you told me, sir, and I don't intend to make any settlement—I don't believe in settlements."

"Nor do I—much," answered the Colonel, somewhat doubtfully.

"If I were to settle money on Betty, her children and her children's children, and then there was an almighty smash-up, Betty would probably have to

raise money on her life interest in the settlement, and the very person that the settlement was intended to benefit would be out of it. Besides who knows what duties one's grandchildren might have to pay? There may be a dozen new succession duties by then. With the present socialistic movement, only the fool will mortgage the future."

Colonel Standish began to blow smoke rings like a foolish boy—no one can enjoy a cigarette whilst he is blowing rings—and to wonder what was coming next. He felt the justice of what John was saying, and yet he did not like to think that his daughter would be dependent on her husband.

"What I propose to do," continued John, "is to make over a sum in first-class securities to Betty; the interest must be enough to pay for her frocks or a new horse, if she wants one. When I die everything will come to Betty and the children; there was no direct heir, so my father and I cut off the entail. I think that will be all right, won't it, sir?"

"It's generous!"

"If one trusts a girl enough to trust her with one's honour, it's not much to trust her with a few thousands; besides it'll teach Betty how to manage money. I can't live for ever. That brings me to the second thing I want to ask you, sir."

"Fire away!" laughed Colonel Standish.
"You're doin' all the talkin'."

"Do you mind how soon we're married, Colonel? You see, I'm thirty-five, and time counts."

"That's for you and Betty to arrange. I shan't interfere."

"Thank you, sir." Tracey lit a fresh cigarette, and smoked meditatively for some seconds; but he was excited and wanted to talk. "I wonder how the Japanese manage about settlements," he remarked.

"I'm sure I don't know." Now that there was an actual prospect of losing Betty, the Colonel was inclined to be silent.

"I should imagine that when a Japanese married, he'd settle his grandson's earnings on the soul of his grandfather, or something of the sort." Then he laughed at himself: "What nonsense I'm talking, sir. I think I'd better go and find Betty." But Miss Standish was none so easy to find.

The housekeeping had been an excuse: the real motive that had inspired Betty to leave the breakfast-table, as soon as she could, lay in a large, square envelope addressed in a bold, scrawling handwriting. She locked her bedroom door, and tore open the envelope.

It was a pathetic letter, almost violent in its self-accusation. Courtenay began by saying that he had only thought of Tracey as a man who had been his father's friend, and (as he supposed) his contemporary. It had just struck him that his father was a comparatively young man, and that he had asked Betty to do what no girl could possibly do. (He had not, of course, received Betty's second letter when he wrote this.) He was writing at once to ask her forgiveness. (It had not struck the boy that this letter would miss the through connection between Scotland and Devonshire.) He had promised Postlethwaite to see his C.O. and he would see his Colonel the moment he could, and find out exactly what could be done; then he'd get leave on urgent private affairs, and lay everything before Colonel Standish. He would sell his traps and try for the Staff College; he would work and work until he had made a home for Betty—and so on for eight pages.

The letter made Betty feel suffocated and, physically, rather sick. She knew, now, that she loved Tracey with all her heart and that she had never cared for Tom Courtenay in the way that a girl should care for the man she is going to marry; she also suspected that he had not cared for her in the

right kind of way. She had made a frightful mistake in giving Tracey his answer before she had definitely broken with Courtenay, but this did not in any way alter her promise to John Tracey. The only thing for her to do was to tell Tracey about her engagement to Courtenay. Strange to say, Betty was so taken up with the idea that what she had to say might pain her lover, and take the guilt off his happiness, that she had but little pity to spare for Courtenay.

Now the situation was of some interest, and the manner in which it must have struck the persons who were most deeply involved is of some importance. Colonel Standish must have regarded a secret engagement, entered into when his daughter was a minor and without his knowledge, as no engagement; he must have regarded Courtenay's conduct as a valid reason for terminating all pretence of an engagement; but he would probably have advised his daughter to wait for Courtenay's letter before she accepted Tracey.

Betty would probably have held the ordinary English idea that when there is a valid reason, a girl has every right to break off her engagement, and Courtenay had certainly given her a valid excuse. She certainly realised that she ought to

have been off with the old love before she was on with the new.

What Tracey would have thought, if he had known about the matter, must be mere conjecture. If the Colonel's view had been put before him, he would probably have seen its justice; he would also, in all human probability, have added that the promise, made by a girl of twenty without her father's knowledge, was *ultra vires*; that she had no more right to make such a promise than he had to promise a lock of her hair to Captain Middleton; and that, unless Betty renewed her promise after she came of age, it was null and void. If the case had been stated wrongly, and Tracey had been in a pedantic, duty-at-any-cost mood, goodness only knows what view he might have taken. John Tracey could be very obstinate and very self-centred; and, when he was in an obstinate humour, his Tracey firmness, combining with his mother's gentleness, made him like an eider-down cushion, which can neither be smashed with a mace nor cut through with a sword.

Betty looked out of her bedroom window and saw Tracey walking up and down the lawn; as she watched him, the difficulty of the situation occurred to her. What she would have to say amounted to

this: "I was engaged to another man all the time that I was spending my mornings with you, and all the time that you were falling in love with me. I only broke off this engagement after you had proposed to me." Then, the reason why she broke off the engagement would put Tom Courtenay in an unjustly bad light (she did not consider this—much) and it would be an embarrassing explanation to make to the man she was just engaged to—and this latter thought affected her a good deal. She was still resolved to tell John Tracey, but her resolution weakened as she went into the garden. She would begin by stating her position as an imaginary case, and then work up to the actualities.

She waited until he had taken the turn away from the house, and, walking quickly and quietly after him, slipped her hand into his arm.

"I want to ask you something," she said, before he could get a word in. "No! You mustn't say anything till you've heard me. Suppose a girl had been engaged—and she got engaged to another man—ought she to tell him all about everything? She ought, oughtn't she?" Betty thought she had stated her supposed case clearly. John naturally imagined that some space of time had elapsed between the two engagements. He thought a minute.

"I don't believe so," he answered. "In the first place there would be no need for the girl to pain herself; in the second place the man might dwell on what she told him afterwards. If there happened to be a tiff, he might get foolishly jealous. I don't believe confessions between engaged people are wholesome."

"But—I'd—like to tell you something—I ought to."

He knew the girl far too well to imagine for a second that there could be anything that was morally wrong, and he did not wish to have their engagement-day spoilt by a confession which might make both of them slightly uncomfortable. "Everything that happened before we met doesn't count," he insisted. "I refuse to hear about anything that happened. Besides, I've something far more important to talk about. How soon can you marry me, Betty?"

"Oh!" she said. He was going ahead quickly! She forgot all about her confession and Tom Courtenay.

"We couldn't be married in a Catholic church, and you wouldn't like to be married in a registry office, would you?"

"No!" she answered with decision.

“The Traceys have always been Catholics, and it would hurt my people terribly if we were married in the Protestant church at Coombe Ottery.”

She nodded her head, for she could see his point.

“The only thing is to be married privately in some London church.”

Again she nodded her head, for this was the obvious way out of the difficulty.

“Now, suppose our engagement were announced; suppose we were engaged for several months——” His appeal to Betty’s reason, just as though she were a man and not his sweetheart, was distinctive of Tracey; so was the calm way in which he broke off his argument in order to light a cigarette. “If our engagement were announced, how on earth could we slip away and be married privately in town? Our positions—everything—would demand that we should be married here; and it is not even as if you had some real relation in London.”

“It’s frightfully awkward!” sighed Betty. She was growing very weary of complications.

“Think of the gossip! If we said we were going up to London to be married privately, all the neighbourhood would be mad with curiosity, and someone would be sure to guess the true reason.”

"I believe," said Betty, thoughtfully, "it would be almost better to be married here than to slip off and get married. It would look—you won't mind me saying it, John—it would look as though you were running away."

"It would, Betty. But suppose no one knew about our engagement until they saw the announcement of our wedding; and suppose we came home from our honeymoon with a splash and a dash. There would be a nine days' wonder, and people would smile at our eccentricity."

A look of relief came into Betty's face. "After all," she remarked, "it only means that we shall have to keep our engagement secret."

Tracey stared at the toes of his boots, wondering at the innocence which made such an idea seem possible: for a man to be continually with a girl, and then to marry her suddenly and privately, would suggest nothing short of a scandal. "I can't explain," he said, "but we must either be engaged in the usual way and be married in the Parish Church; or else we must be married privately almost at once."

"I can't see why," protested Betty, wearily.

"If John Tracey came home from Japan, and fell so desperately in love with Betty Standish that

he persuaded her to marry him within three weeks, and then the couple came back to Tracey and took their places in the county—it would be a romance!”

“And the idea of being married at Coombe Ottery is quite impossible?”

“I’m afraid so, Betty. My giving up my religion must pain the Tracey people; but if I was married in the Protestant church at Coombe Ottery—marriage is an awfully solemn sacrament to Catholics—they’d feel that I’d turned my back on them altogether.”

The affair with Tom Courtenay had worried Betty intensely and her engagement that morning had been a great strain. All this argument on the top of it seemed almost more than she could bear. She felt that she could either get married at once, or break off the engagement, or do anything else that would give her a little peace; and, as Tracey certainly was not at his best when he was arguing, she almost longed for the peace of disengagement.

“I suppose you care,” she asked tentatively. “I mean that you care for me as much as you said?”

He thought, and he frowned as he thought. “If a man wants to do something tremendously,” he remarked, “that man will find reasons why he

should do it. I'm a hypocrite, Betty; but I've been humbugging myself as well as you. I wanted you! I want you terribly! I wanted you so much that I imagined we ought to get married straight off. I suppose if I'd wanted to put off the wedding for a year, it would have occurred to me that we might meet abroad and get married."

A strong man influences a woman, and Tracey was beginning to have a great influence on Betty—an influence that neither he nor she had any idea of—and her moods were beginning to respond to his moods. This change, from an appeal to reason into an appeal to the heart, swayed her.

"I seem to have been waiting for you all my life," he continued. "Now that I've found you, I'm frightened. It sounds absurd, but I'm frightened to death of losing you. It haunts me!"

Betty felt weary no longer.

"I suppose it's nerves—or anxiety—or something—but I'd better tell you the whole truth——" He cleared his voice. "The Traceys have been horribly unlucky about their marriages—and I've been frightened—ever since I asked you to marry me—I'm frightened that something may come between us before the wedding. I know it's all rubbish—or nerves—or something—but I can't help it."

"Is it as bad as all that?" whispered Betty.

"It is."

"Poor John!" whispered Betty.

"I suppose——" and he hesitated. "Do you love me enough to marry me straight away?"

"And put you out of your misery?" Her weariness was quite forgotten, and there was a wicked little dimple forming near the corner of Betty's mouth.

"Yes!" he answered doggedly.

She looked into his eyes, and a divine impudence came over her. She walked away, inviting him with a glance to follow her. She led the way behind a clump of laurels. She closed her eyes tightly and tilted her chin.

"Oh!" she cried, with reason.

"Then you'll actually marry me on Monday!" said John, unsteadily. "On next Monday!"

"You're awfully impatient—Mr. Tracey."

"But you will, Betty?"

"I said so," said she, softly.

There was no "Oh!" this time.

They were walking very slowly towards the house.

"I can't get away this afternoon, John—I really

can't. Just think! I must pack everything, and I must make a list of the clothes I'll have to buy in Paris, and I must leave dad comfortable. You'll have to go to Exeter by yourself."

"How on earth can I choose it without you?"

"I'd much rather you chose it without me—only don't get an expensive one. I don't want to be a jeweller's shop."

"But I don't even know the size!"

"Would—you—like—to—measure with a piece of meadow grass?" asked she, demurely, holding out her left hand, with all except the third finger slightly depressed. She knew that this method was reliable only in poetry, and she had a ring that fitted her all ready to give him. "That variegated grass in the border will do."

She read something in Tracey's eyes and, glancing first at the house and then at him, laughed and shook her head.

It was the woman telling the man what the man had forgotten—that they were now in full view of the windows.

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE C.O.'S QUARTERS

TOM COURTENAY sauntered back from early parade, turned into the mess for his post and breakfast, and found Betty's letter—the one which announced her probable engagement to Tracey. He glanced through it and, as he was a thorough Englishman, he managed to eat his breakfast without showing that anything was the matter; then he went across to his quarters, took out the letter, and again read it through.

He was a nice boy; but, in spite of his twenty-two years, he was still a boy, and he still retained that strange blend of quixotism and cynicism, of inexperience and world-wisdom, which marks the boy. A woman becomes a woman at about twenty; a man is severely young in some ways and abnormally old in other ways until he is well on towards thirty—then he becomes his own age. That his senior major should marry a girl of about Betty's age had seemed to him natural; but that his father's friend could fall in love with Betty had

never entered his thoughts, and the fact still remained incomprehensible. As a boy, he had learnt to turn to Betty in his scrapes; as a man he had failed to grasp the elementary principle that he should approach Tracey as man to man, without a woman's intervention. Nevertheless, he now saw his mistake, and realised the justice of Betty's letter.

The breaking off of the engagement hurt him intensely; and, although it was in reality more of a blow to his pride than a blow at his heart, he did not know this—he was exactly like a sick child who does not know what is the matter with it—and deserves pity.

Tom Courtenay got through his morning somehow, lunched in the town, and made his way to the Colonel's quarters. Wisdom had prompted him to make his appointment for the afternoon, since C.O.'s who are apt to be liverish in the morning become amiable after lunch.

"I've got into rather a mess, sir," began Courtenay, uneasily.

"So I gathered," remarked the Colonel. "Sit down, and help yourself to a cigarette." He was a sympathetic C.O. as C.O.'s go. "Now, out with it!"

"I've been speculating, sir; I've been backing horses, and unless I can find two-fifty by Monday, I shall be posted. I want to ask your advice about sending in my papers."

"Isn't it rather late in the day for that, Courtenay? Don't you realise that it will be Lieutenant Courtenay of the L.L.I. who will be posted, and not 'Mr. Courtenay, late of the L.L.I.'? Have you been quite fair to the regiment?"

"I'm awfully sorry, sir. I thought——"

"Of course you did! Boys always think that something's going to happen that will get them out of a scrape; then, when it's too late, they come and tell their Colonel. What did you think? Were you going to fleece the bookmakers—it's awfully easy work fleecing the bookmakers, isn't it?—or was a raven going to flop down with a bundle of fivers? Eh, Courtenay?"

The boy grew red; he was feeling an utter fool.

"Now, look here, Courtenay," continued his commanding officer, "if I can help you out of the difficulty, will you give me your word never to bet again as long as you're in my regiment?"

"I will, sir." Courtenay was wondering what the Colonel could possibly suggest.

"And will you sell your ponies and cut down expenses? You've been far too extravagant."

"Yes, sir."

"Would four hundred put you right?"

"Yes, sir; more than put me right—that's to say, with what I get from my ponies and things."

"I've just had a letter from a man who knew your father, saying that he had heard you were in a scrape, and enclosing a cheque. Mind, ravens don't flop down like this twice in a lifetime!"

Tom Courtenay paused to do some rapid thinking: he had written to Betty, specially mentioning that Tracey had been a friend of his father, and asking her to borrow money for him. Betty had announced her engagement to Tracey, and the desired cheque had come (from a friend of his father) simultaneously. In mental arithmetic, two and two may make four, but they are often added up so that they make six or eight.

"May I ask who sent the cheque, sir?" inquired Courtenay. "I've—I've a reason for asking."

"You may state your reasons, Courtenay; but I can't promise to give you an answer until I hear it: the letter's more or less private."

"I don't want to see the letter, sir," urged the boy. "I don't want to know what's in it. I only

want to know if the man's named Tracey. I can't take the money if it's Tracey."

The Colonel hesitated. These people were really making his task very difficult.

"It's like this, sir," blurted out Courtenay, in desperation: "I heard from a girl I was engaged to, this morning, breaking off the engagement and saying that she was going to marry Tracey. Don't you see I can't take the money?" He was not trying to gloss matters over, only to show that he could not accept the money. "Tracey couldn't have known of my difficulties unless the girl had told him, and I can't take the cheque, sir!"

"I see," said the Colonel—it seemed so clear from Courtenay's account that this girl had thrown over the penniless subaltern in order to accept the man of means, and that she had persuaded Tracey to clear off Courtenay's debt as a sop to her conscience. "I shall write to Mr. Tracey, telling him that under the circumstances I could not advise you to take the money. Now let's see what can be done to pull you through."

To cut a long and uninteresting story short, the Colonel found that Courtenay's affairs were much better than the boy imagined, that he had certain shares in East Indian properties which had already

begun to feel the increase in the demand for rubber, and, advancing him enough to settle his bets—he was an exceptionally kind C.O.—the Colonel packed the boy off on a week's leave.

Alone in his quarters, the boy reviewed the situation. From a financial standpoint there was hope, and with hard work and strict economy he might even have made a home for Betty within a year or two; but what he had done was awful, and the result of what he had done was even worse. It was clear to him now, clear as daylight: Betty had spoken to Tracey about the loan, and had sacrificed herself to Tracey, so that he might make it. He did not know how, nor could he tell exactly what had happened; but of this he was certain—Betty had in some way sacrificed herself in order to persuade Tracey to lend him the money.

Then there came a wave of reaction. He was freed from the worst of his money worries, and Betty would free herself from this Tracey and send him packing. His spirits rose with a bound, and he wrote a wild letter to his sweetheart.

“Kindly tell Mr. Tracey that you are bespoke,” he wrote, “and that I would rather see you dead than married to him. Tell the hairy old pirate that he is old enough to be your father, and that what

he really wants is a nurse, etc., etc.” This relieved his feelings somewhat. “I know you loved me when you promised to marry me. I know you loved me last time you let me kiss you. I know you loved me when you sacrificed yourself to Tracey. I know this because you are not the girl to love and then change your mind.” Which last sentence relieved his feelings altogether.

This letter was delivered at Coombe Lodge on Saturday afternoon, and, as Betty had already gone up to town with Colonel Standish, it was forwarded to her. There are no Sunday deliveries in London, consequently it was impossible for her to receive this letter until Monday morning.

CHAPTER XX

A WEDDING

THERE are some girls who are always wholesome, and whose waking is as sweet and fresh as the unfolding of flower petals: so when Betty woke she smiled to herself because her dreams had been pleasant, she stretched herself luxuriously for her bed was very comfortable, and she opened her eyes. She looked round the room, wondering where she was. Then she realised that she was in her bedroom at the Hotel Richard, and that this was her wedding morning.

Probably she felt something of that shrinking from the unknown that the most devout young man would feel on the morning of his ordination, or the keenest Girton girl on the eve of her first situation as high-school mistress; but, almost as she opened her eyes, the chamber-maid came to draw up the blinds and tell her that her bath was ready, she had to rouse herself and prepare for her bridegroom, and the feeling of uncertainty was lost in the certainty of her love for John Tracey.

"Something old," she whispered presently, as she drew on a silk stocking that she had worn at the Coombe Ottery lawn-tennis ball.

"Something new." A white kid shoe followed.

"Something borrowed." She had to think a minute before it occurred to her that she must borrow a pocket-handkerchief from the chambermaid.

"Something blue," and she secured the silk stockings with a length of blue ribbon in place of the customary suspenders.

By a stroke of luck, Betty had chosen an autumn dress of white serge; by the interposition of a kind Providence, September had been so warm that she had never been able to wear it; and, as she placed a large white hat, bought just before the shops closed on Saturday, at a becoming angle on her head, she looked the very ideal of a girl who was about to be married in her travelling dress. Doubtless, God could have made a sweeter looking bride than Betty Tracey; but, doubtless, He never did.

But here the bride-elect found herself in a dilemma, for how could she wear a veil, tucked under the chin after the fashion of 1908, and yet so arrange the veil that she could be kissed when the wedding was over? She had only just solved the

difficulty by an ingenious compromise, when there was a knock at the door and the maid entered.

“The gentleman in Number Fourteen asked me to give you this, ma’am,” and the maid placed a muff and stole of silver fox on the dressing-table. “The gentleman from Fifteen asked me to give you this.” It was a spray of white heather, with a brooch formed of five large pearls attached, all ready to pin it on. “And both gentlemen told me to say they was starting.”

The furs were sumptuous, and the heather as fresh as dew, but Betty found her chief pleasure in the two notes that were tied to the presents—one saying that John feared she might find the church cold—the other, signed by Postlethwaite, bidding her hunt in the heather. She hunted, and found a sprig of orange blossom artfully concealed in the midst of the ling.

“And Number Fourteen told me to ask you to look inside the muff, ma’am,” added the chambermaid, as Betty was wondering what she should do with the muff when it came to the pledging of the marriage vows. She looked, and found a long rope of pearls, fitted with a clasp so that it might form a muff chain. “John seems to think of everything,” thought Betty.

She walked down the stairs, worthy of a whole-page illustration and two columns of description in *The Queen*, to find a very impatient father waiting for her; but, alas! she discovered that she had forgotten something, and, with a hurried excuse, she ran upstairs and rang for the maid.

“Oh! could you lend me a handkerchief?” asked Betty.

With one inquiring look at the pile of dainty pocket-handkerchiefs on the dressing-table, one laughing look at Betty, the chamber-maid fled to the service room. “This belongs to Number Eleven, ma’am,” she explained, “so please let me have it immediately after the wedding.”

“Then you knew——?” cried the bride-elect.

“I’m shortly to be married myself, ma’am,” confessed the chamber-maid. “I hope you’ll be very happy!”

“What a mercy I remembered!” murmured Betty as she ran downstairs with the handkerchief in her hand. “I nearly wasn’t properly married!” Then she laughed at her folly.

Whilst Betty was finishing her toilet, playing with the magic of “something old and something new,” and keeping her father waiting, John Tracey and St. John Postlethwaite were cooling

their heels in the porch of St. James's, Piccadilly. As the wedding had been fixed for eight-thirty, and it was already five-and-twenty to nine, John was beginning to grow nervous, and Postlethwaite was doing his best to keep him engaged in conversation.

"I can imagine many things, old chap," remarked Postlethwaite, craning his neck as though he could hope to see round the corner and up Sackville Street; "but I can't picture you inside, with the parson breathing Eden over you."

"Nor can I," answered John. "Did you notice the front of the choir stalls? They're carved in columns, exactly like the Tracey portico."

"I suppose you'll celebrate the real ceremony at breakfast? Eat some rice and share a cup of *sake* with your bride—that's the correct formula—isn't it?"

"Or break a tile, like a couple of gipsies," sneered Tracey. "They're all equally absurd."

"Why, what's wrong?" asked Postlethwaite, sharply. "What do you mean?" It was not like Tracey to speak slightly of marriage, especially his own marriage.

"Do you imagine that the parson, or the *sake* cup, or the broken tile makes a marriage?"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Why, man!" exclaimed Tracey, "one's laws may register the marriage, or one's religion may bless the union, but marriage is older than any law or any religion. It's the man and woman who do the marrying."

"Oh!" begged Postlethwaite. "Will the honourable Oriental honourably deign to enlighten his dishonourable friend?"

"Marriage is only the permanent mating of two persons who intend to live together and bring up their children together." His eyes had a far-away look and he seemed wrapped up in his subject, but his ears were listening for the sound of the motor-cab. "I always think that English people are so intent on the wedding, the wedding breakfast, and the bridesmaids, that they have forgotten the real essence of marriage."

"Which is——?"

"To live together naturally and have children. And I always think it's because English people have forgotten this, that their divorce courts are crowded."

"Go on!" said Postlethwaite. "You're interesting me."

"It's the swan-song of John Tracey," continued Tracey with a smile. "You see, Postle, when I'm

married, the subject will be sacred between my wife and myself. By Jove! here they come! No, it's only an empty taxi!"

"Sing away, old swan!" laughed Postlethwaite. "I'm listening."

"As you know, I've given up my religion, but the Catholic Church is pretty right about marriage, all the same. Suppose two Papists—we'll call them John and Joan—live in a country where the Catholic marriage is legal without any other registration: if they went through the ceremony, and lived together, neither the Pope nor anyone else could unloose the marriage. But, if they went through the ceremony, and John deserted Joan at the church door, Rome would hold that the marriage had never been consummated, and the Church could dissolve the union. Suppose, on the other hand, John and Joan were wrecked in the Antarctic, and took each other as man and wife without any ecclesiastical or legal ceremony, Rome would hold that they were married. Listen! Isn't that them?" There was the throb of a motor, followed by a loud back-fire.

"It's them, if they've chartered a vanguard. Warble ahead, Tracey."

"What I've said sounds sensual," remarked Tracey, meditatively, "but an engaged man keeps

his thoughts awfully clean. He marries the girl because he likes her so much that he wants to have her near him always. You understand, Postle?"

Postlethwaite nodded his head. This was what he wanted to get down to.

"They go off together; everything's right, and the inevitable is inevitable. That's marriage! From my point of view we're just going to register our marriage—nothing more. I say, how late they are!"

"Bride's difficulty with her back hair—delay of the wedding—bridegroom's suicide—awful tragedy! Come, buck up, Tracey!"

"Don't rot!" said Tracey, testily.

"Practise your religion, old chap," encouraged the Postle. "Be a brave, bold Buddhist! If the bride's smashed up, you'll meet her in your next reincarnation. It would be rather awkward, though, if she came to life in the body of a giraffe and you as a black beetle. Come along! Let's have a squint down Piccadilly," and he tucked his arm affectionately into Tracey's.

Mrs. John Tracey went upstairs to Miss Betty Standish's bedroom, with joy singing in her heart. Her love for John Tracey was really assuming most

alarming proportions, and his absurd happiness at seeing her when her cab drew up at St. James's had put the crowning touch to her joyousness. Breakfast would not be ready for quite ten minutes, and she meant to make a full use of her time.

She took off her hat—it would be an affectation to wear it when there were only four of them at breakfast—and, moved by the same impulse she had felt during that first evening at Tracey, she took a rose from a vase on the dressing-table and placed it in her hair. The rose was a vivid red and, what with her light hair and white dress, it struck a note of colour that was only repeated by her lips: John should see that he had married someone who was as dainty as anyone in Japan. She smiled at the reflection in the mirror, and the reflection smiled back at her. “Well, if I’m as pretty as you,” said Betty Tracey to the reflection, “I must be very pretty indeed.” Such were the reflections of Betty Tracey.

Next, she took the pearl rope and wound it three times round her neck, and pinned the spray of white heather a trifle higher on her shoulder; and she took a small parcel of tissue-paper from her trunk and produced the lace handkerchief which Tracey had given her in exchange for the diary one. Lastly she

turned to the mantelpiece for some lavender-water to scent the handkerchief, and she saw a letter which had come whilst she was at church. There was no mistaking the handwriting, and she tore open the envelope.

“DARLING, DARLING BETTY,—I have got your letter, and I have seen the Colonel and I understand. I can only say I love you a thousand times more than I did before you were mad enough to engage yourself to Tracey. It *was* a mad sacrifice, but what you have done has made me realise how much I love you.

“My affairs have turned out much better than I thought. I am selling my ponies, and with real economy I can make a home for you before long.

“Kindly tell Mr. Tracey that you are bespoken, and that I would rather see you dead than married to him. Tell the hairy old pirate that he is old enough to be your father, and that what he really wants is a nice respectable nurse who will look after his gout and soothe his declining years. Of course I don't mean this seriously, but you will have to tell him that you have mistaken respect(!) for affection, and that you feel you care for him like a father—or something.

“I know you loved me when you promised to marry me. I know you loved me last time you let me kiss you. I know you loved me when you sacri-

ficed yourself to Tracey. I know this because you are not the girl to love and then change your mind.

"I have behaved very badly, but it was not as bad as it must have seemed to you. I will explain when we meet. I hope to get some leave in about three weeks, and then I will explain. The C.O. has just sent me off for a week's leave, and I must finish my packing. How I love you, darling.

"Your most loving

"TOM."

The joy left Betty's heart and the brightness went out of her face. Her first impulse was to tear the letter into shreds, but with it there came the instinct that told her she was a married woman, and that she must show the letter to her husband. She would wait until they were in the train, and then she would show him the letter and tell him everything—everything.

But what had she to tell? Simply that she had promised to marry Tom before she had any idea of what love meant; that she had fallen in love with her husband before she had any idea of what love meant; that Tom had shown himself quite unworthy of being her—any girl's—husband; that she had written to break off the engagement, and had accepted John. Her sole mistake had lay in acting on what she had written without allowing for the

delay of the post. But how would John take it? And why had she been such a weak coward? And why had she not insisted on telling Tracey before they were married?

She had not an atom of pity for Tom Courtenay; because, when a woman loves a man as intensely as Betty now loved Tracey, she is ready to slay any man who would come between herself and her lover.

She looked at her reflection in the mirror with nausea; she pulled out the rose, and flung it in the fireplace; she put on her hat, and stuck the hat-pins through it savagely. She arranged her veil so that it covered the top part of her face, and went down to breakfast leaden-footed.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PARIS EXPRESS

A WHISTLE blew, and the Continental Express steamed slowly out of Charing Cross Station. Postlethwaite had gone on ahead to secure seats, and Postlethwaite had managed to secure a reserved compartment, but what is the use of a reserved compartment in a corridor train? The very fact that the compartment is reserved only prompts the foreigner to peep in from the corridor with increased curiosity.

Since there were people passing and repassing, Tracey seated himself opposite Betty. He loved to look at her, and she was like a snow maiden in her white dress and white furs. It is true that she was paler than usual, but then John Tracey was no Magenta Rake to admire the Pink Purity with its Scarlet Kisses, dear to the Lady Novelist. If she should look paler than usual, had she not just said good-bye to Colonel Standish?

And yet, he could not help noticing that the corners of her mouth were sad, and he could not help remem-

bering that she had been very subdued during breakfast. The instinct of the man to comfort the woman, the instinct of the lover to come close to his sweetheart—even though only his arm might touch hers—possessed him, and he crossed over and sat beside Betty.

“Well, Mrs. Tracey,” he said, taking her hand, and pulling it down between them until it could not be seen from the corridor. “So I’ve got you at last!”

“John,” she began—then she hesitated a moment and pressed his hand—“I want you to be good to me—I’ve something horrible to show you.”

He smiled at her; and his smile made her task the more difficult, partly because she knew that Courtenay’s letter would hurt him, and partly because she guessed that it might shock him.

“You remember on the lawn, just before you—why should I mind saying it—just before I let you kiss me?”

“Yes!” answered Tracey.

“You remember I wanted to tell you about my engagement, and you wouldn’t let me, and I was a coward and didn’t insist?”

“And I’d rather not hear about it now, sweetheart,” he replied, squeezing her hand. “Wait till we’re back from our honeymoon.” It was evidently this absurd confession that had been disturbing Betty.

"But you must hear! I've had a letter about it—a beastly! beastly! beastly! letter, and you must see it. Don't you understand? You're my husband, and you must see it!"

"Who's it from?" Tracey was not inclined to take the matter very seriously.

"The man I was engaged to—Tom Courtenay."

"Oh!" said John. He had received back his cheque, and realised that there might be more in this matter than he had at first imagined. Incidentally, he had seen photographs of Tom Courtenay in the drawing-room at Coombe Lodge, and had noticed that the boy was exceedingly handsome.

She took the letter out of her muff and handed it to him: he took the letter from her and read it through very slowly.

He did not fly into a temper like a proper man, for his stay in Japan had taught him to control his temper and act with gentleness and courtesy. It would have been far easier for Betty if he had flown into a passion.

He did not make light of the matter and comfort his bride, like a man of the world who had won his trick, for he had cultivated an abnormal sense of honour, and anything that could touch Betty's honour in the remotest degree distressed him.

He loved Betty intensely; he felt for Betty intensely; but this matter seemed to him as far apart from his love or feelings as a question of religion seems to some of the religious. So his voice took that hateful, impersonal, duty-at-any-cost tone that many adopt when they are speaking of religion to their nearest and dearest. It was this particular tone of John Tracey's that invariably froze Betty, and made her both tongue-tied and rebellious.

"I don't understand this letter," said John, gravely. "I suppose you'd broken off the engagement before I proposed?"

"I didn't—I hadn't—at least I'd written."

"What did you write, Betty?"

"I wrote saying—asking—for an explanation," stammered the girl. Then she burst out: "You're not very sympathetic!"

John sighed.

"Oh, yes!" she cried, "I wrote breaking off the engagement before I gave you your answer, all right."

"If it takes two to make an engagement," said John, quietly, "it takes two to break it. Had you your answer, little Betty?"

"That's my answer!" said she, pointing to the letter, "and you might have known it."

A Frenchman in the corridor stopped and looked through the window until John's scowl drove him away. Then Tracey re-read the letter, and another aspect of the case struck him.

"Did you care for Courtenay?" asked John.

"Do you imagine I'd have accepted him unless I'd liked him?" she answered defiantly. He would not help her to tell her story. He would not encourage her to make explanations. He asked her questions in that hateful tone of his that made her feel like a shy, foolish little schoolgirl; and now he was staring out of the carriage window into vacancy.

His silence swung on through mile after mile of Kent, accompanied by the sing-song of the train, until it became unbearable.

"Well?" said Betty.

"It was my fault," answered John, sadly. "I ought to have listened to you, but I thought—never imagined it could be anything serious."

She wanted to press him for an explanation, but she was afraid of trusting her voice.

"If you don't mind, I'll go into a smoking carriage," said John, rising. "I must think things over."

"Poor little Betty!" he added, tenderly, and he stroked her cheek with the back of his fingers, in a horribly paternal manner.

CHAPTER XXII

CONCERNING JEALOUSY

IF this chapter should prove wearisome, adopt Mr. Eustace Miles' advice—"Don't worry! Skip!" And yet it is somewhat difficult to understand how Courtenay's letter affected John Tracey, unless we form some idea of the action of jealousy.

I. In the notices of Mr. Harry W. Cox, who died on 9th July, 1910, from X-ray dermatitis, the Press gave a list of sixteen other victims of science. The *Express* concluded its notice:

"The majority of these men suffer acute and incessant pain for which there is no known relief.

"Most of them have suffered amputation and operations, and many have lost the use of their hands.

"The disease is a progressive one, growing steadily but relentlessly, so that in many cases one operation is succeeded by another, and as soon as the disease has been checked in one quarter it breaks out elsewhere."

The action of the X-rays is painless, and the

malady does not make its appearance until some time after the damage has been done.

Practically every other ailment can be traced to some understandable cause: a bruise, burn, or strain, a poisoning by some mineral or vegetable, the introduction of animal or vegetable germs, the failure of some vital organ to renew blood and tissue or to remove refuse. With X-ray dermatitis, an invisible current of X-rays flows through the tissues; nothing is felt and nothing appears until X-ray dermatitis sets in.

The only reasonable solution of the problem lies in Sir Oliver Lodge's theory of the human body being composed of numberless electrons revolving at an incredible speed, and the assumption that the X-ray current alters or disturbs these electrons, so that they cease to be normal electrons acting in their normal, healthy manner. This theory is strengthened by the certainty that no electric current could leave any poison or other material substance behind it, and that the X-rays make no visible alteration in the human tissues; it is confirmed by the knowledge that the passage of an electric current may cause some alteration in those electrons which form substance.

II. A bar of soft iron, for instance, is composed

of numberless electrons, each of which is a tiny magnet with its constant flow of the magnetic current. Under normal conditions these tiny magnets so adjust themselves, that the current flows from one to the other, and none of the magnetic current leaves the bar of iron.

But take this bar of iron, place it inside a coil of copper wire and pass a strong electric current through the wire; all the tiny magnets in the iron are turned round the same way, their magnetic currents flow in the same direction, and the united volume of these magnetic currents flows out of one end of the bar, through the air, and in at the other end of the bar, making the iron bar a strong electromagnet.

Remove the iron bar from the coil of copper wire; the tiny magnets in the iron swing back to their original positions, each satisfies the other, and the bar of iron ceases to be magnetic.

The disturbance caused by the electric coil has passed, and the iron comes back to its normal condition.

III. Again take the bar of iron, and treat it so that it absorbs carbon and is converted into steel. The steel is still composed of those tiny magnets which formed the iron; those tiny magnets are still

in the same position, each satisfying the other; but the electrons have, so to speak, become jammed, and can only be swung round with difficulty.

Place the bar of steel in the electric coil, striking the steel sharply so as to jar the electrons, and the steel becomes an electro-magnet in exactly the same way as the iron. The tiny magnets, what with the shock of the jar and the force of the electric current, have been swung round so that their magnetic currents unite and flow in the same direction.

Remove the steel bar from the coil of copper wire; the tiny magnets in the steel are jammed so firmly, and move with such difficulty, that they cannot swing back to their original position and satisfy each other: the bar of steel remains a permanent magnet.

IV. If the ordinary electric current can produce such an extraordinary effect on the electrons which constitute steel, that the steel is converted into a permanent magnet; then the little known current that we term X-rays can surely produce some extraordinary and permanent effect on the little-understood electrons which form the human flesh.

V. Now the theory of human love between man and woman, which was formulated in Chapter V—half in jest and half in earnest—does not appear

improbable; and if it be true, it accounts for jealousy as well as for love.

Take the idea that love is mental attraction, and what is to distinguish the idea from that of platonic affection? Take the idea of mere physical attraction, and the idea is not nice; but assume that love is some magnetic attraction which is more tangible and physical than platonic affection, and less selfish and sensual than the lower passions, whilst it combines the best qualities of both, and you have the neatest possible definition of love.

If the love between a man and his particular mate originates in the harmony of the electric particles; if love is the satisfaction of the positive electric current which flows from the man, by the negative electric current which flows from the woman, and vice versa; then, anything which checks or diverts the flow of the love current—whether the disturbing cause be mental or physical—must produce very grave and serious consequences.

In ordinary cases, this disturbance is called jealousy; and jealousy produces such extraordinary results, in both thoughts and actions, that it is impossible to ascribe the malady to any known cause. Once let something, either physical or mental, either real or imaginary, upset the current of true love,

and jealousy will set in as surely as an excess of the X-ray will produce dermatitis.

Brain-fag predisposes a man to jealousy; and an over-tired man is apt to become jealous on the most trivial pretext.

Let jealousy get a firm hold, and it spreads through the system and affects the brain until the victim loses his mental balance; he ceases to think like a normal person and he often acts in an abnormal manner. No one would call the Spaniard who murders a rival in a fit of jealousy perfectly sane, and the Englishman who keeps his jealousy secret is no more sane than the Spaniard; the difference is the difference between a sudden outburst and a fixed mania. In fact, just as a bar of soft iron that is affected by the electric coil recovers its normal qualities when the cause is removed, so the violent man often recovers from a fit of jealousy; the calm, firm man is more like the tempered steel—his jealousy is apt to be permanent.

John Tracey had gone through much mental strain during the few days before his wedding; he had worked almost ceaselessly so that he might get his affairs in order, and leave for his honeymoon with a clear conscience; he was in the exact physical and

psychological condition to be attacked by jealousy.

Given a fairly reasonable cause, and Courtenay's letter furnished an excuse above the average, jealousy might produce a disastrous effect on Tracey's character. The natural man in him must have inherited a tendency towards jealousy; a fear of the Tracey curse would help to foster and nurture this trend in his disposition; his cultivated habit of gentleness and courtesy would make him hide both his temper and feelings from Betty; and, last but not least, since jealousy always takes the path of least resistance, his high sense of duty might easily be perverted into some imaginary and quixotic way of honour.

As for Betty—there is no doubt that she would have felt the reasonableness of an honest outburst of jealousy in response to Tom Courtenay's letter; there is no doubt that she would have been sweet enough and womanly enough to win him out of his mood. But the wholesome self-respect of a wife could not be expected to bear the jealousy that disguises itself as an angel of duty.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PARIS EXPRESS—(CONTINUED)

JOHN TRACEY was fortunate enough to find a vacant corner in a first-class smoking carriage, and he leant back and instinctively lit a cigar. Tom Courtenay's letter had given him plenty to think about, but his predominant idea—the idea he could not get away from—was that Betty loved Courtenay. The words—"you loved me when you promised to marry me—you loved me last time you let me kiss you—you loved me when you sacrificed yourself to Tracey—I know this because you are not the girl to love and then change your mind——" floated before his eyes. He knew that they must be true—that they were true—because the concluding argument was unanswerable, and Betty was certainly not the girl to love and then change her mind.

There were recollections and suggestions enough to feed his thoughts. There was her protest that she had never thought of his falling in love with her during those happy weeks when they were planning the lake together; there was her unwilling-

ness to accept him when he proposed, and her hesitation in giving him a definite answer; there was, above all, her unwillingness to let him kiss her. Courtenay's letter had spoken of kisses, but she had withheld her lips from him as long as she decently could.

He did not recall her gracious actions to him, or if he did remember them he did not dwell on them, for the very essence of jealousy lies in looking at the evil and ignoring the good.

He did not feel angry with her. It would have been far better for him and have hurt him far less if he had been angry, but Betty had given him no cause for anger. It was not as though she had fallen in love with Courtenay after she had been engaged to Tracey, or even after she had met Tracey. She had done him no wrong—except the supreme wrong of giving him herself without her affections.

Of course he knew girls who had thrown over men they cared for, in order to marry men who had money; but he did not for one moment imagine that Betty had acted from mercenary motives, nor did he imagine that she had jilted the penniless sub so that she might secure a comfortable home and a position in the county. Then, why had she married

him? The letter implied that Courtenay had behaved very badly, and that his behaviour had appeared even worse than it was in reality; but Betty was not likely to have broken with Courtenay in a fit of anger, and immediately have engaged herself to someone else.

He could not imagine that Betty was to blame, but how about the Colonel? Colonel Standish had not known of her engagement to Courtenay when he asked permission to try and win Betty, and the Colonel approved of her engagement to himself. Surely when the trouble had arisen about Courtenay's conduct, the Colonel had used his influence on behalf of Tracey. He could not blame the Colonel. Who could blame a father for wishing to see his daughter comfortably married? And the blunder in accepting one man, before she was off with the other, had surely been the bungling of Betty's inexperience.

Poor little Betty! She had probably accepted him from motives of duty and affection towards her father. She must have known that she could not hope to marry Courtenay—his knowledge of Courtenay's affairs combined with the letter made this certain. She did not dislike him, and so she accepted him. No! He would be just to himself. She liked

him, she liked him honestly. "Tell him," said the letter, "that you care for him like a father." That summed up the situation.

It was a hideous thought, that this girl of twenty-one, who was in love with a good-looking boy of about her own age, should be tied to a middle-aged man whom she only liked! It was contrary to nature. It was a sacrilege. He shrank from the idea of taking the privileges of a husband. He would try to return to the position that they had held towards each other before he proposed.

Thus did his reasoning carry him on, mixing truths with half-truths, and using both as the base for false deductions. He had been thoroughly tired out before he had read Courtenay's letter, and his brain worked, as the brain of every over-tired man works, without proper self-control: for the brains of a clever man and the brains of a clever madman both work with recollection, invention, and imagination; and the difference between sanity and insanity lies in the fact that sanity concentrates and directs the thoughts, whereas insanity does not; and a clever man who is so tired that he has lost control over his brain has ceased to be sane and reasonable.

His jealousy had never broken out in anger; now

it took the form of melancholia: he felt an intense pity for Betty, and a despair for himself.

But stay! What about Betty being engaged to Courtenay, and Courtenay refusing to release her? Could a man who had sworn fidelity to his wife swear fidelity to another woman? Could an English soldier take vows of allegiance to the German Emperor? Surely Betty's engagement to Courtenay, and Courtenay's refusal to release her from her promise, had made it impossible for her to bind herself to John Tracey!

His brain, jarred by the shock of the letter, swung round in obedience to his new idea; and the belief that he and Betty were not really married became as surely fixed as the electrons of a permanent magnet.

It was true that they were firmly married by the law, and that this legal marriage could not be dissolved except through a scandal which he had no idea of incurring; but there was no reason why they should not live together as friends. This would be an honourable course for himself, and surely an agreeable course for the girl who was in love with Tom Courtenay. There was no reason why they should not be as happy together as they were before he asked Betty to marry him; and if,

at any time, the position should become impossible, there was always The Way Out. His life in Japan had taught him that, when honour or the good of others demands the sacrifice, there is always The Way Out. He would go and tell Betty his decision, and relieve her mind—but of course he would say nothing about The Way Out.

“Well?” said Betty, smiling sweetly at him as he entered the compartment. If she had been crying, she had managed to remove all traces; for she knew what every wise girl knows, that, although tears may be “the rain-drops which glisten in the garden of love,” even the most violet of eyes do not look well beneath red eyelids. She had realised that Courtenay’s letter must have been a severe shock to him, and she was anxious to show both love and sympathy. Then it would be his turn to comfort her.

He sat down beside her and took her hand, just as he had taken it before; but now she felt that there was an impalpable difference in his touch.

“Do you realise what that letter means?” he began, speaking very tenderly.

“I don’t think so,” she murmured. Her heart was beginning to beat fast, and she felt herself slipping back into the schoolgirl.

"If you were married to one man, could you marry another?"

"But—I—wasn't—married!"

"If you mortgaged your property to one man, could you give it to another?"

"N—o——!"

"If you mortgaged yourself to one man, could you give yourself to another?"

She was biting her lip as hard as she could.

"It isn't your fault, dear," he said. "You meant to do everything that was right and sweet. It isn't your fault, Betty; it's the sort of luck the Traceys have always had."

He paused a minute, but Betty was speechless.

"Don't you see, darling? We're legally married—just as fast as the law can tie us; but you weren't free to marry, and you couldn't marry, and we're not married. I mean we're not married by what you'd call the law of God, and I'd call the law of honour."

He made another hateful pause.

"I know why you hesitated when I asked you, and I know how you must have shrunk from the sacrifice," he continued, oblivious to her gesture of protest; "but I want you to feel that you haven't

married a brute who'll take advantage of you—and—that we'll live together—like friends."

Again he paused, but this time it was not to formulate logical arguments.

"We've been such dear friends, Betty," he said unsteadily; "and I care for you more than I ever did—and I'll do all I can to make it easy for you—and you can trust me—and I'll try all I can to make you happy—and if you ever feel you can't bear it, I'll find some way out—a perfectly honourable way out—and——" His feelings were getting the better of him; and, if he and Betty had been absolutely alone, it is possible that his love might have conquered his jealousy; but he saw Betty stiffen, and, following the direction of her glance John saw that the Frenchman was again peering into the compartment.

Tracey rose quietly. He went to the door quietly; but the Frenchman did not like the look of this large, quiet man, and, before John could reach the corridor, the Frenchman had scuttled along the passage, bolted into another compartment, and John could not follow him without making a scene.

Again John seated himself beside Betty. "May I kiss you, once?" he asked.

She allowed him to raise her veil, but she turned

her lips away from him and her cheek towards him. He kissed her, and he felt her shudder as he kissed her. He imagined that it was a shudder of distaste mingled with relief; but it was the shudder of a wife whose womanhood was being outraged. Then Betty drew herself up and looked out of the window.

Now, if a bar of magnetised steel—with all its tiny magnets wedged in the same direction and all its magnetism flowing in the same direction—be heated to the temperature of boiling water, the steel will expand, some of the rigidity will be lost, some of the electrons will swing back and satisfy each other, and some of the magnetism will disappear. If the steel be heated red hot, all the tiny magnets will be free to swing back to their original position and the magnetism will vanish altogether. But if the steel which had been heated to the temperature of boiling water were chilled to freezing point, it would be capable of being permanently re-magnetised.

So it was with John Tracey. Before the Frenchman interrupted his talk with Betty, his heart was beginning to warm, his idea was losing its rigidity, and his belief that he and Betty were not married was beginning to waver. Then the kiss and

Betty's shiver had chilled him, and the idea that he and Betty were not married had become permanently fixed.

As Betty was a bad sailor he had not yet engaged rooms in Paris, and they had resolved to stay the night in Dover if the crossing should be bad. One glance at some cottage that they were passing told him that the smoke was going up almost straight; so, taking a telegraph form from his bag, he wrote: "Hotel Continental, Paris. Reserve two single bedrooms and *salon*. Dinner seven-thirty." He thought a moment and finished: "Dinner seven-thirty in restaurant.—Tracey." Dinner in the restaurant would amuse Betty, and make it easier all round.

He handed her the telegram; and when she had read it and given it back, he said: "We'll be friends, little Betty?"

"That's what I always wished," she answered coldly and untruthfully.

She heard him give an involuntary sigh, and she began to feel sorry for him.

"You must give me a little time—John," she said. "It seems rather strange—and—I must get used to it—and—we'll be awful friends."

She held out her hand to him, and he kissed it.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HONEYMOON

BETTY leant back in her chair and looked at her husband wearily.

They had finished their first *tête-à-tête* dinner at the Continental. Neither had eaten much, and the conversation had languished; for how can one eat with a lump in one's throat? and how can one talk with a heartache?

"If you don't mind," said the girl, "I think I'll go to bed. I've a bit of a headache, and I don't think I'll wait for the coffee." She looked far more tired than she ought to have looked after an eight hours' journey from London to Paris.

"Poor little girl!" said the man, standing up and putting his hand on the back of her chair, ready to draw it away when she rose.

"Please don't!" answered the girl, bravely. "The headache's nothing; I shall be all right to-morrow."

"Good-night!" said the man, when he had seen her to the lift. "I hope you'll sleep well!"

“ Good-night ! ” answered the girl. Then she smiled at him and whispered : “ I mean to be awfully happy.”

Tracey went back to his coffee, miserable. The situation was so hopeless, and Betty was so brave ! He drank his coffee and smoked his cigarette, whilst his conscience wrestled with his pride.

“ You might go upstairs to see if Betty is quite comfortable,” whispered his conscience. “ It is the least you can do.”

“ It is dangerous ! ” muttered his pride.

“ It will be far more dangerous if you never go near your wife’s room,” suggested wisdom.

“ Eh ? ” said John Tracey.

“ When you return home, the servants will talk ; they will hint to each other that the master never visits his wife’s private room.”

John knit his forehead, for this was a new light to him.

“ And if the servants talk,” continued wisdom, “ the County will know : there are many ladies who gossip with their maids. And if the County learns that John Tracey never visits his wife’s room, they will say that John Tracey has discovered something wrong with Mrs. Tracey.”

“ Guard your own honour ! ” whispered his pride.

“ Pity Betty ! ” whispered conscience.

Now Betty had her pride, just as much as John ; but Betty's pride belonged to that higher order which is not rightly pride, only self-respect, whereas John's pride was that true pride which has its roots in egoism. Self-respect is noble, egoism is base ; self-respect is generous, egoism is selfish ; self-respect is reasonable, whilst egoism is the most unreasonable vice in existence.

During the journey from Calais to Paris, Betty had plenty of time to review the situation. She had seen the fallacy of John's specious argument that since she had mortgaged herself to Tom Courtenay, she was not free to give herself to John Tracey ; for an engagement, without the parent's consent, cannot rightly be called a mortgage, and Betty believed that Tom had only refused to free her from her promise through some complete misunderstanding. Besides, if a girl has promised to marry a man, the man has promised to provide a home for the girl ; and if the man breaks his share of the understanding by squandering his money and failing to provide the home he has promised, then the girl has surely the right to demand a release from her share of the undertaking.

She had not attempted to set this argument before her husband, during the second stage of their journey, partly because she had every reason to believe that John was not amenable to argument, and partly because she knew that if he adopted his superior tone, she would be unable to state her case coherently. She did not attribute her husband's mood to a blend of jealousy, pride, quixotism, and over-tiredness, as she ought to have done; but she put it down to some scruple or some train of Shinto logic.

Above all, she realised that John had an argumentative mood during which he was very obstinate, and a sympathetic mood during which he was open to reason; and she realised that, although Betty his sweetheart might quickly bring him to reason, his "friend" Betty might argue till doomsday without shaking his convictions.

So, although her English pride rebelled and her modesty shrank from taking any active steps, her sweet, warm Italian nature made her long to remove the misunderstanding and bring her husband back to his allegiance.

She had not formed any definite plans—she had not even tried to form any definite plans, and she was far too tired to dwell on the future; she put

on a loose kimono that John had given her, and took a Tauchnitz novel out of her wraps with the intention of reading herself to sleep. There was a knock at the door.

"*Entrez!*" said Betty, looking up.

"Oh, John!" she said. The words were ridiculously inadequate to express her conflicting emotions, but her tone made them eloquent. After what had passed, her pride told her that her husband had no right to come to his wife's bedroom; the sweeter part of her almost hoped that he had come to beg her forgiveness; the whole of her felt an overwhelming shyness.

"I came," said he, awkwardly, "to see if you did not want something, a cup of chocolate, or—a brandy-and-soda."

The absurdity of his excuse struck her, and his evident embarrassment restored her self-possession; do what she would, she could not keep the laughter out of her voice: "Chocolate——!" said she. "Why, I've hardly finished dinner! And—brandy-and-soda!" She gave a strange, choky little laugh.

"It wasn't really that," he explained; "but I couldn't turn in without seeing that you were comfortable"; and she knew from his words and the tone of his voice and the look in his face that

he had come out of kindness, and not to beg her forgiveness.

"Oh! I'm comfortable," she answered quickly. "I'm awfully comfortable! I've got everything I want." She waited for him to say good-night—she could hardly say it first, without appearing to order him out of the room—but he made no move to go.

"I'm awfully comfortable!" she repeated nervously.

"I have something I want to say. May I come in for a minute?"

If he had only begun "I've been a fool!" or "I'm wretched!" she might have smiled at him; but the propriety of his request made his request an impropriety. She hesitated one moment: then she realised that she could not possibly say "No!" Besides, she was in her kimono, with her hair done up.

He came in and closed the door after him, whilst she moved over to one of the easy chairs and seated herself. "Please sit down!" she said; "and please smoke—I like it. Please smoke!" she insisted; "I wish you to." She felt that the fact of his sitting down and smoking would convert her bedroom into a sort of sitting-room, and make the situation less embarrassing.

"I think you know you can trust me?" he began, taking out his cigarette-case.

"I can trust you," answered Betty, coldly.

"And you know that I would not ask you to do anything, unless I had the strongest reasons?"

"Yes," she answered, still more coldly; for he seemed to have the "strongest reasons" for everything he did.

"I am going to ask you to let me do two things, and I want you to consent without asking my reasons."

Now that the first idea of the impropriety of the situation had worn off, Betty found herself strangely indifferent.

"First, may I sometimes come into your room, just as I have to-night? You might even allow me to stay, sometimes, whilst you are brushing your hair. I am asking it as a favour," he continued, as he saw her hesitation; "and I have a reason for asking."

"Perhaps it would be wise," she answered—for his "reason" was obvious, and she had no desire that their platonic relations should be public property.

"And, may I kiss you sometimes?"

Again she hesitated, for his request sounded so

cold-blooded. Again she saw the reasonableness of his proposal. "Perhaps it would be wise," she answered with just a tinge of cruelty.

He watched her moodily: she had never appeared so sweet and desirable—even her very coldness attracted him. Now that he had repudiated his rights, retaining only two shadows as a matter of graciousness on her part, he felt a great longing. The man's craving for possession was overpowering—even though it might be only the phantom of possession. "May I have another cigarette, whilst you brush your hair?" he asked.

"I'd rather not, to-night," she answered. "I'm exceedingly tired."

Then the girl felt sorry for the man; and, as he said good-night, she lifted her cheek to be kissed—but she did not blush, and he might have been kissing a statue.

So the situation closed, and the platonic marriage was consummated. Betty had behaved just as any modest girl must have behaved under the circumstances; Tracey had carried out the programme which he had planned over his coffee; but the platonic marriage left both of them wretched.

In one way, it is true, the girl experienced a certain sense of relief, for a bride's sacrifice of her

girlhood—although it may be a willing act of self-abnegation when she loves truly—is a sacrifice. But this sense of relief was overwhelmed in an indescribable feeling of loneliness, just as though her husband had deserted her; and, above all, there lay a supreme mortification. For in love, it is the man's place to woo, the woman's to be wooed; the man's instinct to press forward, the woman's instinct to hold back; and, when the man holds back, he places the woman in an abominably false position.

In one way, John ought to have experienced much consolation in his belief that Betty was in love with Courtenay, and that she welcomed the present arrangement (which belief her last kiss tended to confirm); but it is doubtful whether his belief brought rest—it certainly brought no sleep.

CHAPTER XXV

THE JESUIT

IT was half-past eight when Betty woke the next morning, and, although she awoke with a feeling that something wretched had happened, a night's rest had taken the edge off her mortification; before she had finished dressing she had almost recovered her spirits, and the idea of a life with the man she cared for, free from all maternal cares and matrimonial responsibilities, did not seem altogether unpleasant.

All the same, she came down to breakfast expecting to feel horribly shy and self-conscious. But as she stepped into the hall she experienced a thrill of pleasure: John appeared so genuinely pleased to see her. He seemed to have thrown off his recent mood, and to have resumed that friendliness which had first attracted her.

"How's the headache?" he inquired, taking no pains to keep the admiration out of his eyes.

"Gone!" she answered, blushing.

“ And you can manage breakfast—a real English breakfast? ”

“ Is there any need? ” asked Betty, smiling at him. “ I’d like rolls and coffee as well as anything.”

“ And yet, madam, but a day ago, you enjoyed a hearty, wholesome English breakfast? ”

“ They tell me, sir,” answered she, falling in with his humour eagerly, “ that when one is in Rome, one should adopt the habits of the Romans! ”

“ And since the essence of Paris lies in the fact that she is cosmopolitan what could be more Parisian than an English breakfast served with a French accent? ”

“ Then, sir,” laughed Betty, “ if you will lead the way, I follow, for I am famished! ” It was really a relief to find John so unembarrassing.

They seated themselves and began their breakfast, chatting merrily, for the breakfast proved to be one typical of the English middle-classes—pig, unrelieved by even the slightest trace of the Parisian accent—a culinary sacrifice to the *entente cordiale*.

“ Look at that dear old clergyman who’s just come in! ” said Betty, handing John his cup of coffee. “ Isn’t he typical? He might be the Vicar of Wakefield, or the ‘ dog that bit the man ’ parson.”

"First an English breakfast, and now the Established Church! Where is he?"

"Three tables away, on your right."

"Parson!" scoffed John. "Why, it's a Jesuit—a crafty, cunning Jesuit! I must go over and speak to him; he used to be a great friend of mine."

"How exciting!" said Betty, examining the priest with interest. "Do bring him here! I've never met a real Jesuit."

"What do you expect to find? He's just like anyone else:

'Two eyes, a nose, a chin,
With a mouth above to pop his food in.'

That does not mean that his mouth's above his eyes, only above his chin," he explained.

He went over to the Jesuit; and Betty saw the priest look first surprised, then pleased, then interested, and finally he rose and came across to her.

"I have been congratulating your husband, Mrs. Tracey," he said, taking her hand and looking at her with approval; "and I hope you will both be very happy."

She thanked him prettily, and asked him to join them at breakfast.

"You haven't any bloaters on the table?" asked the Jesuit, eyeing the dishes with suspicion.

"No!" said she, laughing. "It's all bacon and sausages and things. But why?"

"For the last twelve years I have been tormented by the association of your husband with bloaters," he answered moodily.

"My husband and bloaters——?" repeated Betty.

"If you were a priest, Mrs. Tracey—assuming that you can imagine yourself in such a position—how would you like to remember an absurd story, whenever you said Mass?"

She looked at him and raised her eyebrows expectantly.

"Whenever I mention your husband's name in my intentions, I always think of bloaters. The obsession has become habitual with me."

"Then why mention my name in your intentions if it gives you distractions, Father Thrapstone?" suggested John.

The priest waved the objection aside—he was not going to be led into any side issue. "I used to be a great friend of your husband's father, Mrs. Tracey; and I often spent my summer holiday at Tracey. The chaplain would go off on his holiday, whilst I took John for his lessons. He was an excellent little boy!"

"Yes!" said Betty, wondering when he was coming to his point.

"Now, the Tracey menu showed a great refinement in the choice of breakfasts: one might find salmon, trout, whiting, and even pilchards, but never anything so vulgar as bloaters. You follow, Mrs. Tracey?"

"I believe it's much the same now. This particular breakfast's only an accidental orgy," explained Betty.

"Sometimes," continued the priest, deliberately, "when I took John in grammar, I would give him a word, and tell him to build up a sentence round it: for instance, I would give him the word 'trout,' and he would write: 'Amongst the fishes of the river, the trout is the most difficult to capture,' or some such literary effort.

"Well, Mrs. Tracey, one day I gave him the word 'bloaters' as the theme of his composition, and he wrote: 'With a fervent prayer, the bloaters charged up the hill.'"

"Oh! How lovely!" cried Betty.

"Note the piety of the sentiment! Do you wonder that I think of bloaters when I mention John Tracey? He was a most excellent little boy!"

"I thought they were a kind of soldier," protested Tracey.

"Imagine a regiment of British infantry uttering fervent prayers as they 'charged up the hill'! Don't plead altruism as an excuse, John Tracey!" and the Jesuit gave a merry chuckle.

"How long are you staying here, Father Thrapstone?" inquired Betty.

"Only a day," replied the priest. "I am on my way to Rome and young Lord Rixton asked me to travel with him, which accounts for my staying at such an expensive hotel. I am hoping that everyone will mistake me for a rich Anglican clergyman."

"My wife did," said John.

"How nice of you, Mrs. Tracey! And are you staying long?" He had fallen to, and was enjoying his breakfast thoroughly.

"We are going on to a delightful little place John knows of; it's called Arcola, and hasn't been discovered by the tourist, and then to Florence."

"Look here, Father!" broke in Tracey. "The Bishop's given me a raw young priest as chaplain. He came just before I left, and I can't stand him!"

Father Thrapstone nodded his head.

"You know I'm still an unbeliever?"

"You would have told me if you had regained your faith," said the Jesuit, wisely.

"Although this Father O'Dwile upsets Gill, I might manage to bear him myself." Tracey smiled, and then grew very grave. "But when we come to dessert, he begins to lecture me about my soul."

Father Thrapstone sighed, for the weakness of all modern religion lies in some of the very young and enthusiastic, whose zeal overrides their charity, and whose earnestness overlooks courtesy.

"If I can get the Bishop's consent, Father Thrapstone, would it be possible for you to come for a time as chaplain? If you could only come for a year, it would give me time to build a church and presbytery at Coombe Ottery. I shall find a resident chaplain extremely awkward."

"Oh! do come, Father Thrapstone!" urged Betty.

"The way I asked you sounds ungracious, Father," added Tracey, quickly; "but you know how I should like to have you."

The Jesuit finished his coffee slowly. "I will see the Father Provincial," he answered. "If you can secure the Bishop's consent, it might be managed. Do you know your present Bishop personally?"

"No!" said Tracey.

"I should advise you to see him yourself, and state your case fully. I will do what I can."

"It's sweet of you, Father!" cried Betty. "I can't tell you how grateful we are!"

The Jesuit made a motion of deprecation, as though to wave the thanks on one side. Then he smiled at the girl: "In this case, duty is a real pleasure, Mrs. Tracey"; and, with a "God bless you!" he went off to see about his packing, and the Traceys were left alone.

"What a dear old man!" said Betty. "Are all the Jesuits like that?"

"Most of the old ones are, sweetheart. The younger ones are more reserved; but they are all absolutely unselfish."

"Then, why are they so unpopular?" asked she.

"Was the Founder of your religion popular, Betty?"

"No!" answered Betty, looking puzzled.

"I always think the reason of the Jesuit unpopularity is this: the Jesuits attract many of the best young men who believe they have a vocation, and no one who is not sufficiently in earnest to stand a fourteen years' training can join the Order. The fast young Countess of Park Lane goes to the

Jesuits in her trouble, because she knows they will sympathise with her; Connie of Piccadilly goes to them, because they will understand; old Lord Croesus asks their advice about making his will, because he knows it will be just; they are both successful and sought after. No Order can be very popular without causing jealousy; and no Order can devote itself to helping sinners without offending the rigourists."

"Aren't you rather a—a strange unbeliever, John?" asked Betty, smiling.

"I'm only just, little girl. I could say much the same about many of the Shinto and Buddhist priests."

They sat in silence for some moments. "I want to say something, darling," said John. "I'm sorry I was so moody yesterday. I'm going to do all I can to make you happy. Now go and dress for your shopping, and don't keep your husband waiting."

She looked at him wistfully.

"You'll find me by the stairs in twenty minutes," said Tracey.

He watched her go upstairs—their rooms were on the first floor—and sat down to wait for her. He had fought his moods, and faced the situation,

during the night. If Betty had fallen in love with a boy whom she could not possibly marry, it was no fault of hers. If she had been led into a hasty marriage with a middle-aged man whom she only cared for, it was only due to the girl's ignorance. To take a maiden of twenty-one away from her boy lover, and give her in marriage to a man of Tracey's age, was an enormity, and he would respect her innocence.

As he sat there, he felt certain that Betty cared for him far more than she did for anyone except her father, and he saw no reason why their platonic marriage should not prove successful. He had money and position; Betty's tastes were in sympathy with his; he was devoted to the girl and was determined to make her life as happy as he could; incidentally, he would snatch as much quiet happiness as his honour permitted. If this unusual drama should ever threaten to change into a tragedy, and Betty's welfare should demand his exit—— And he shrugged his shoulders.

Such a train of thought sounds impossible, and it would have been impossible in most men of thirty-five; but Tracey's religion had kept him straight whilst he was a boy, and a certain fastidiousness had kept him straight during the past fifteen

years. He had kept his life under very strict control, and he lacked both the experience and worldly wisdom of the ordinary man of the world.

Father Thrapstone had not been far wrong when he hinted that John Tracey was an altruist.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BARRIER

IT is unnecessary to discuss the nature of the barrier which divides the sexes; but, amongst English people, men and girls of the upper and middle classes are separated by a barrier that is very seldom broken down except through marriage.

Under all ordinary circumstances, the barrier between man and woman is swept away by matrimony; yet, even in the case of married persons, the wife sometimes manages to reconstruct a barrier of mock-modesty between herself and her husband, with chilling results. If this be so, it is easy to imagine the position of John and Betty Tracey.

For with the Traceys—robbed even of the intimacy that is inseparable from a long engagement—this barrier had never been destroyed or even weakened, and each day of their platonic honeymoon served to strengthen it. The very absence of a chaperon, the very fact that John could go into his wife's bedroom whilst she was changing her shoes or brushing her hair before lunch, created an ever-

strengthening mental hedge in place of the actual hedge of conventional propriety.

It must not be imagined that the couple were unhappy. From the commencement of their stay at Arcola, John adopted the mental position of a guardian with a delightful ward; and, by the time they moved on to Florence, Betty had adjusted herself to the new conditions. She had taken up the thread of her girlhood with the addition of a husband who was merely a dear friend and interesting companion, and she had no particular wish to alter their mutual relations.

Now it was inevitable that John Tracey should remember the cheque which he had sent to the C.O. of the Lowland Light Infantry on Courtenay's behalf, for it is not a pleasant thing to discover that one has sent money to a man whose sweetheart one has taken; so, after some deliberation, he wrote a cautious letter to Tom Courtenay, explaining that he had sent the cheque solely on St. John Postlethwaite's suggestion and that, until after he had despatched the money, he was not aware that there had been any understanding between Courtenay and Betty. Courtenay's reply came just before the couple reached Florence; and, as the letter was only

a courteous expression of comprehension, Tracey thought that there was no need to worry his wife by reopening a painful subject.

They had been some ten days in Florence, and that morning they had climbed the heights of Fiesole. They had avoided the new road with its sacrilegious tramway, taking the steep path by the Mugnone; and by the time they had visited the chapel where St. Francis had preached they were quite ready for lunch. Leaving the more pretentious hotels for the tourist, they had chosen a small inn with a balcony which seemed to hang right over Florence.

John and Betty had grown very friendly during the last few days, friendly almost to the verge of flirtation. Perhaps the warm Southern blood was stirring in the girl's veins; but during the walk up to Fiesole, Betty had been taciturn, and as lunch progressed she grew more and more silent. "I have a letter which I ought to show you," she said, at last; and she handed her husband a letter which she had received that morning.

"DEAREST BETTY," he read, "I am frightfully sorry for the letter I wrote you. Of course I had no idea you would be married when it reached you, and I would not have written such a beastly letter for

worlds if I had known you were just going to be married.

"There is no good in pretending that I was not in love with you, and that the idea of your marrying anyone else was not an awful shock to me, but I ought never to have written that letter, and I want you to forgive me.

"I have discovered that your husband is an exceedingly good sort, and I hope you will be very happy.

"The Colonel has found out that one of my investments—some rubber plantation shares—is likely to turn up trumps; but my luck has come too late.

"I don't want you to answer this, but send me a picture post card and put an 'F' on it. This will mean that you have forgiven my wretched letter.

"Yours very sincerely,

"TOM COURTENAY."

John read the letter and handed it back to Betty. He could see that this letter released his wife from her engagement promises to Tom Courtenay. He could see that she was free to take her share of the married life; and yet——?

His eyes wandered across the city that lay below him. It looked as though it were built of ivory, and silver where the sun caught it. His eyes rested on the dome of the cathedral, and it seemed to him that he was like the duomo watching over The City

of Lilies. He had treated her as his ward. She had appeared happy as his ward. Had he a right to ask for more? He could guess that this letter had upset her, and he could see that she had hated showing it to him. Was he going to take advantage of the letter?

Anyhow: "I think you might send the boy his post card," said Tracey, picking out a view of Florence from a stand of picture post cards on the table, and pencilling a faint "F" on the duomo.

The girl held out her hand for the card, tore it into scraps, and flung the scraps down towards Florence. The sun had clouded over. "Shall we take the tram back?" said Betty. "I'm cold."

That same evening, whilst Betty was writing home to Colonel Standish, John turned over the pages of the hotel visitors' book, and found the following verses on some local proverb:

"The woman with dark eyes may draw one dagger; she that is fair will draw many."—*Proverb heard at Fiesole.*

"The sun, that rose at dawn
To ripen the barley and colour the corn,
Has kissed her locks.
The sky, or the sea,
Or the gentianella of Lombardy,
Lies in her eyes.

The peach and each lily that grows
Have joined to borrow a hint from the rose
To texture her cheeks.
And, although she's as fresh as the air
Which passed o'er the barley and tinted her hair,
She's as warm—and all—
As the juicy fruit on a sunny wall.

“The olive is hidden beneath her cheeks;
The citron gleams through the strands of her hair;
The blood of the South has darkened her lips,
And, yet, the maiden is fair!—
Fair as the fire of dry beech logs,
Fair as the flare of the sun at its height;
Sweet as the heat of the year-old peat,
As it glows in the heart of a winter's night.

“Who's afraid of the German maid,
Plump as a sausage of pig's flesh and bread?
Who's afraid of the English miss,
With butter-milk passions and butter-milk kiss?
But, he who'd be free, so the proverbs say,
Must not look on the Lily of Fiesole!

“Play with the fire—the fire will burn you!
Learn from my song, ere 'tis too late to learn you!
One single breath of the breeze, that blew
O'er that barley-gold hair, is like barley brew
That steals through the senses and steals through the brain,
And courses, for ever, through every vein:
If you gather fresh fruit from a sun-baked wall,
You're a slave to that fruit, for once and for all!

“Toy with the flaxen-haired girl of the North,
Or sigh with the mouse-coloured English miss;
Or even go courting the dark Tuscan maid,
Though it's a dangerous sporting, you'll find, I'm afraid.
But—stay!
As you value your life, so the proverbs say,
Do not gaze on the Lily of Fiesole!

“The sun, that rose this morn
To kiss all the barley and play with the corn,
Is kissing her hair.
The sky, and the sea,
And the gentianella of Lombardy
Peep through her eyes.
Still fair as each lily that blows,
Yet the full, red blush of the radiant rose
Now stains her cheek.

“And, although there may betide
The thrust of some dagger towards eventide,
My God! she’s as warm—and all—
As the sweetest fruit from a sunny wall.
If I live but the length of this summer’s day,
’Tis life! with the Lily of Fiesole.

“A. J., Apl. 9th, 1908.”

John turned over the page to see if A. J. had written anything more and found, as is always the case, that others had been moved to express themselves in rhyme. The next poet was the inevitable prig:

“To paint this maiden sweet, it is essential
To picture all her warmth as mere potential.”

After this, some cheerful bounder, who had evidently known A. T., had written:

“She seems a darling, this Year-Old Peat Girl,
And A. J.’s a dry old stick;
But Peat will not raise the ghost of a blaze
Till the fire-wood does the trick.

“F. S-L., Apl. 11, ’08.”

This last verse was a vulgar truth, vulgarly expressed; but it was a truth, nevertheless, and it made John Tracey think.

Before, he had dwelt on Betty's hesitation in accepting him, and on the way she had shuddered when he kissed her in the train. Now, other recollections came into his mind: he remembered how she had laughed up at him when he had caught her in his arms and carried her off to Tracey; he remembered how she had laid herself open to his kisses in the garden at Coombe Lodge; and he wondered, for the first time, if he could possibly be mistaken.

He had noticed that Betty possessed the same richness of colouring that was to be found in some of the fair Tuscan girls, that she had the same shimmer of life in her hair, the same depth in her eyes, the same warmth in her lips.

Then it came to him (only he was afraid to take this thought too seriously) that there was a dim possibility that Betty might have married him because she loved him as he loved her; and that the poem of the "Lily of Fiesole," together with the gloss of the prig and the suggestion of the vulgarian, might all be true.

So, just because he was honest and straightforward, he put his hopes to the test, in an honest,

straightforward, blundering way, and carried over the visitors' book to show Betty.

"What do you think of this?" he asked, placing the book on her writing-table.

She read the verses through and closed the book. "How absurd!" said Betty. She thought a minute, and added: "How horrid!"

"It's not bad for tourists' poetry," remarked Tracey.

Betty dipped her pen in the ink, and went on with her letter.

This was the completion of the barrier between John Tracey and his wife Betty.

CHAPTER XXVII

AT TRACEY

“ Beatus venter qui te portavit, et ubera quae suxisti. In meditating on The Joyes of Our Ladie, refrain, O Religieuse, from dwelling over zealouslie on the Joyes of Her Maternitie. For although she was granted the Joye of Bearing, she received the ever constant Sorrowe of the Destined Crucifixion; and although she possessed the Joye of Nurturing, she foresaw that The Flesh which she was feeding would become Food for The Scourges.

“ Quinimo, beati qui audiunt verbum Dei, et custodiunt illud. Yet if Our Ladie’s Joyes were converted into Sorrowes by the Shadow of The Roode, her Natural Grief was Tempered by Submission to the Divine Purpose, and her Sorrowes were Converted into Joyes by the Consolation of Perfect Obedience.

“ So, O Religieuse, if the woes of thy barrenness should occur to thee and the loneliness of thy state trouble thee, fix thine eyes on The Will of The

Divine Spouse, and Derive the Joye that ariseth from the Consciousness of thine Obedience."

Betty laid down the manuscript of "The Meditations of Dame Barbara Tracey" with a rebellious heart. It was all very well for a pious lady, who seemed to Betty to have been either a nun or old-maid, to comfort herself in this way; but it was quite a different matter for Betty Tracey in the first vigour of her womanhood. She wished that she had left the book in its place on the library shelf, beside Dame Jane's "Day-Book" and other of the Tracey manuscripts.

During her month abroad, Betty had been happy enough, for there had been things to do and things to see, and—except for the one thoughtless act of showing her that poem in the visitors' book at Florence—her husband had been perfectly tactful and absolutely devoted. But from the time of their homecoming, her life completely altered.

It was not that John neglected her; it was rather that he schemed to spare her every worry and give her every pleasure; and, just where she ought to have taken her place as Mrs. Tracey, with certain worries and responsibilities that must fall on the mistress of a big house and the lady of the manor, Betty found herself more in the position of a daugh-

ter of the house with an indulgent father. For John thought of Betty as his ward, and not as his wife; and where he would have come to his wife with his troubles, he spared his ward; and where he would have told the servants to go and ask their mistress, he bade them not to bother her. This, however, was only the lighter part of her cross.

Betty's real trouble began on the first evening of her homecoming. The couple had been welcomed home in the old-fashioned way; triumphal arches had been erected, the Coombe Ottery volunteer band had been waiting outside the station, and the tenants had taken out the horses and pulled the carriage up the drive; the rest of their people had been drawn up on the terrace, and there had been speeches and much drinking of healths.

Then, as the climax, the youngest married woman amongst the tenants—her husband was a small farmer, and they had been married a twelve-month—had come forward, carrying her baby. “If you please, ma'am,” the girl had said, holding out her baby, “this is the youngest on the estate, and I pray that God may bless you as He has blessed me!” It had been a pretty scene, prettily contrived, but it had brought shame and confusion on Betty.

Only that morning she had gone down to see her

husband's old nurse, and the woman had told her how the bells had been rung and the people had grown wild with delight when John was born. "If I may make so bold, ma'am," the nurse had added, "I keep on praying that they bells may ring again, for we dearly need a Tracey."

This was the atmosphere that surrounded Betty; for, unless the Traceys had an heir, the property would go to Heaven knows who, and the whole estate seemed to throb with anxiety. If the girl had only known that she might expect to fulfil her duty sooner or later, if she had been like other wives, Betty would have smiled at all this hurry; if she had known that she should be childless through some unkindness of Nature, she might have borne her trouble with some of the resignation that Dame Barbara had preached; but Betty realised that she was strong and healthy—the very woman to bear a healthy heir—and yet, unless a miracle converted her husband, she was doomed to remain childless.

It was not only the wish to do her expected duty that troubled the girl; there was an infinitely stronger desire—the desire which Nature has implanted as an overwhelming instinct in every real woman—the desire to have a baby for her sake, for

her husband's sake, and above all for the baby's own sake.

So, when Betty ardently longed for a baby, she was absolutely sweet, natural, and womanly. Her life, with its two duties of filling the flower-vases (this might well have been left to Gill) and visiting the cottagers, was empty; and her life craved for a baby, or the thoughts of a baby, to fill it. Added to this, there was the subtle sense of shame that must haunt any young wife in Betty's position.

Again Betty took "The Meditations of Dame Barbara," and turned over the pages. She wondered if Dame Barbara had been a nun, and whether her ideas about "the loneliness of the state" depicted the usual feelings of those who lived the life of celibacy. No! She could hardly have been a nun, for the next page but one contained a meditation for "She who liveth in the world and keepeth herself unspotted," and there were other meditations which might have been written by a married woman. Gradually her mind drifted away from Dame Barbara and fixed itself on her own case, and she sat looking dreamily over the park, with the book lying neglected on her lap.

It seemed so hard that, when John had caught her love and won her love by his sheer personality,

he should leave her to face the real battle of life alone. Her life and thoughts were as pure as snowflakes; but she loved her husband intensely, and, just as the snow melts when it reaches the warm earth, so ought her life to melt into the life of marriage. She felt that her present state was not natural, and she knew that it was not what God had intended. She had given herself to John, and with that her initiative must end. It was John's part to take her and love her and teach her the secrets of life.

Until they had started on their honeymoon, John had been everything that her heart could wish for. Then there had been a sudden change, and she wondered what had caused this change. Of course, John's change had dated from the time that she had told him of her engagement to Tom Courtenay and showed him Tom's letter; but she did not believe that her husband could still imagine that there was any moral bar to their marriage. The idea was too utterly absurd, and she could not think of anything else which could have caused the alteration in his behaviour. She loved her husband so much, and cared for Courtenay so little, that the true reason of John's conduct never even entered her head, and she was like a person caught in an invisible net—

she could not see the meshes, and she could not think of any way in which she could break through the meshes.

Betty looked out of the window and whistled softly. "Peter!" she called: "Peter!" And with a rush and a scramble Peter scampered through the hall and flung himself on her lap. He had grown wonderfully well behaved, had Peter, and as a rule he would not have attempted to jump on Betty's lap, but this was clearly an exceptional occasion.

She hugged him close. "What would you do, Peter," she asked, "if you were caught in a horrid rabbit-net, and you couldn't see the net, and you couldn't see how to get out?"

Peter gave a little whine, as though to say that he would bark for his master to let him out.

"But I can't bark, Peter; and, besides, it isn't really a net, it's more like the 'great gulf fixed' in the Bible—I can't come to him, and he can't come to me."

"Oh! it's quite simple," said Peter. "Get him to unfix the gulf—pull out the pegs, or cut the string or something!"

"But he can't, dear! A gulf isn't like a rabbit-net—it's like a river. John's one side of the Otter, and I'm the other; and the water makes such a noise

that we can't hear each other. If I try to tell him, he'll only ask me to trust him and leave everything to him, and I shan't be able to say anything more. Girls can't shout across rivers, Peter."

"It's quite simple," said Peter. "Ask him to wade across!"

She squeezed Peter hard. "If I only could, little dog. If we could only be on the same side of the river for one moment, and he put his arm round me! Oh! I'm miserable, Peter," she sobbed, hiding her face in his coat: "Miserable!"

Peter wriggled round to lick her face; then he pricked up his ears, for he heard someone coming.

Betty shifted her seat swiftly, so that her back should be towards the light and her eyes in the shadow, and, catching up Dame Barbara's Meditations, she slipped the book under her and sat on it. If John should happen to notice that her eyes were red, he must not connect their redness with Dame Barbara.

"I have made out the list of the people I want you to ask for the house party," said John, handing her a sheet of paper. "With the exception of St. Cyre and the Foresythes, who are old friends of mine, most of the people have something to do with the county."

Betty read through the list of invitations. Some of the people she knew slightly, others were complete strangers to her, but she had seen most of the names in the society papers—and with an effort she got the control of her voice.

“They’re an awfully smart lot,” she remarked doubtfully.

“They’re people we ought to ask, dear,” he answered. “Of course you can add anyone you like, and I haven’t put down either your father or the Postle.”

“I don’t expect dad will be in England. I met him this morning, and Colonel Ferrier has asked him to go to Algiers in his yacht, and Mr. Postlethwaite will probably go too.”

“Then why not ask young Courtenay?” Tracey’s voice was quite casual, but he made the suggestion with a set purpose.

“I’d rather not,” said Betty.

“Why, dear? Those letters we got at Florence were awfully decent, and Postle tells me the boy’s doing very well. I think it would be a nice action on our part.”

“If—you—wish,” stammered Betty.

“I do wish,” said John, stooping over her and kissing her eyes. “Don’t wait lunch for me. I’ve

some business in Coombe Ottery, and I may be late."

"Oh! Peter. Can't you see!" cried Betty, as the door closed after her husband. "He's so awfully kind, and yet he's miles away from me." And Peter snuggled up to her.

John Tracey covered the mile and a half that separated Tracey from the market-place in Coombe Ottery in just over fifteen minutes; for when one has been considering a plan for a couple of months, there is much relief in definite action.

He had seen, especially since their return to Tracey, that Betty was unhappy. He had learnt the reason of her unhappiness from Courtenay's relentless logic:

"I know you loved me when you promised to marry me. I know you loved me last time you let me kiss you. I know you loved me when you sacrificed yourself to Tracey." These were only statements. Then came the proof—"I know this because you are not the girl to love and then change your mind."

Then, the sight of Betty's tears, and the suspicion that she had been pouring out her sorrows to Peter, had been the final touch which fixed his decision and told him that it was time for action.

Acting on the wise principle which makes the carpenter "measure twice and cut once"—because if the board be once cut, and there should happen to be some small miscalculation in the measurement, it is impossible to re-cut the board any longer—he intended to bring Betty and Courtenay together, and make certain that his measurement of the situation was accurate.

In the meantime, he must be commencing his preparations, for his plan must be carried out deliberately, without the chance of a single flaw escaping his notice, and without the possibility of detection.

Now there is a certain drug which is known to Eastern physicians, and better known to Indian poisoners because it is a vegetable extract which almost defies analysis. A small dose of this drug—we will call it "datura," although that is not really its name, and it is far more deadly—a small dose of this drug will produce a refreshing sleep with no bad after-effects; an overdose will ensure Nirvana. Few English medical men have any practical experience of "datura," and very few would be rash enough to prescribe so deadly a poison. Fortunately for his purpose, John happened to have a "datura" prescription, which had been given

him by his Japanese doctor for a severe attack of insomnia consequent on Biwa malaria, and this he took to the Coombe Ottery doctor.

He explained that he had suffered from severe insomnia during the past six weeks—omitting to say that this was due to mental and not to physical causes—and, after some trouble, persuaded the doctor to get him a concentrated solution.

“I do not like prescribing drugs for insomnia, Mr. Tracey,” said the medical man. “They are likely to become a habit. I do not like prescribing drugs which I do not know personally, least of all such dangerous drugs as ‘datura.’ I do not even know whether there is such a thing as a ‘datura’ habit.”

“Do I look like a man who would take to drugs?” asked John, wearily.

“Some of the best and cleverest characters fall victims to the drug habit, Mr. Tracey, and I do not like the idea.”

“If I could only once get into the habit of falling asleep, as soon as I go to bed!” said John, thoughtfully. “Well, I’ll give you my word that, if I can’t cure myself within four months, I’ll leave off taking the drug.”

"Thank you!" answered the doctor; and they fell to discussing "datura," the doctor asking many questions, and John giving all the information in his power. "You understand why I came to you, instead of asking the chemist to make up the prescription?" concluded Tracey.

"A chemist may be entirely trustworthy; but chemists have assistants, and assistants have friends, and 'datura' is 'datura.' You have acted very wisely, Mr. Tracey!"

"I'm glad you think so," answered John. "You'll send on the stuff? Good-bye!"

"Remember! Place one ounce of the solution in an eight-ounce bottle; fill up with water, and your dose will be a small wineglassful. Be sure to keep the concentrated solution locked up! Good-bye, Mr. Tracey!"

As he walked home, John reviewed his action carefully. Within a few days, he would have eight ounces of sleep in one bottle, and seven ounces of undiluted Nirvana in another bottle, and what could be more simple than to mistake one bottle for the other? The very publicity he had secured through his visit to the doctor would proclaim the mistake to be an accident.

Thus, without a breath of scandal, Betty would

be free, and a useless man would have done his duty.

There had been an error, with its consequent evil and unhappiness. If there had been any chance of himself righting the error and removing the unhappiness, then his self-destruction would be the shirking of responsibility and the result of cowardice; but, since the evil could only be removed by his death, and his death would bring happiness, his self-destruction was the only honourable course.

There were, however, two honourable necessities before he sought the way out. The first demanded an absolute certainty of Betty's affection for Courtenay; the second demanded that Betty should be instructed in the management of the estate. These two essentials secured, the property would pass to a happy girl with a young husband and probable children. The ill-starred family of the Traceys would cease, and the family of the Courtenay-Traceys reign in their stead.

Apart from the ethics of the case (and, far above the ethics of the case) Betty would be happy.

CHAPTER XXVIII

DESTINY

PARTLY through the fear of a General Election, and partly because John had found his hands full, the house party had been postponed; and December and January had passed, bringing a new interest into Betty's life and a great peace to John. For instead of being carried along by circumstances, John had taken the course of events into his own hands, and things seemed to be turning out exactly as he had planned.

His was an unselfish scheme and, in a way, a noble scheme. He realised that Betty and Courtenay had instinctively chosen each other as husband and wife, and the more he thought over the matter, the more he realised that this was the course of natural selection; for, if Courtenay lacked the virtues of caution and prudence, he was both dashing and manly, and Betty had sufficient strength of character for the pair of them. Then he, John Tracey, so soon as he had trained Betty to take her position as mistress of Tracey, would step aside and leave

Tom and Betty to marry and found a new family of Courtenay-Traceys, which would carry on the best traditions of the Traceys whilst it lacked the Tracey faults and the Tracey luck.

As the winter passed, John became able to review the situation dispassionately. Suppose he had behaved as most men would have behaved! Suppose he had indulged in an outburst of anger over Courtenay's letter, and had then made his peace with Betty and gone on with the honeymoon as though nothing had happened? With his inherited temperament and his knowledge of the Tracey curse, he would have brooded over Betty's affection for Courtenay until he became wildly jealous. Every time he kissed Betty or caressed Betty, he would have turned the knife in his wound until it became a festering sore. Finally, he would have made life unbearable both for himself and his bride. He seemed to see "The Book of the Traceys" open before him, and the writing: "John Mary Tracey separated from his wife through motives of jealousy, so much as the law did permit."

Sometimes when he was sitting up late at night, sometimes in the early morning, John would think over his plan very carefully and try to find some

flaw in his reasoning, but he could detect none. To marry a girl and then deprive her of the intimate confidences of her husband was clearly wrong, except as a makeshift; to deprive a girl of the blessings of motherhood was clearly wrong, except as a makeshift. On the other hand, to consummate their marriage, knowing that Betty loved someone else (and that she was not the sort of girl to love and then change her mind), was an impossibility; for, although he did not for one moment imagine that Betty would ever be unfaithful to her husband, he knew himself far too well to venture on such a step.

So John took up his work bravely and honestly, and prepared to leave his wife happy and his house in order; and Betty found that she was no longer a guest at Tracey, but the mistress to whom everything was referred and whose advice was sought on every subject.

This does not mean that Betty's views had changed since the day when she had cried over Dame Barbara's Meditations, or that she had become reconciled to the idea of the platonic marriage, but simply that she had become too busy to worry about her troubles. There were farm-houses to be repaired, farms to be drained, cottages to be built, and the lake to be finished; and on all these points

John consulted his girl-wife so that she might be prepared to succeed to the property. Give a woman even the shadow of an administration, let her dole out alms or manage a girls' club, and she will be keen; but let her share in the active administration of a large estate, and she will become absorbed.

Then there were the ordinary social duties, calls, lunches, dinners, and so on, which took up a considerable time; and when it was possible John either rode with her or drove her in the mail-phaeton. Besides, she saw Colonel Standish every day until he left for the Mediterranean.

And last, but not least, John had felt compelled to keep his promise to his publishers, and had made Betty his partner in his work on Japan. This last labour gave Betty her keenest pleasure; for, although John might sit up whilst his wife slept and create with infinite pains and infinite toil, it was Betty's portion to revise and vivify; and it was Betty's light touch and nimble brain that gave interest to her husband's solid knowledge, and life to his serious convictions. In this way, at least, Betty had achieved her ideal of the samurai's lady.

Now it is impossible for two persons to plan and work and write together without either repelling or attracting each other; and, since the Traceys were

created to attract each other, the winter brought them very close together. If they had become comrades when they first met, they grew into much closer comrades now; and this comradeship was built upon a double foundation, for Betty found that her husband showed a tender thoughtfulness towards her and a wise consideration towards others, whilst John not only discovered that his wife became more and more adorable day by day, but he also found that there was an uncommonly clever little brain tucked away under Betty's barley-coloured hair.

Under normal circumstances, Nature plays its part in the right kind of married love, and Nature was quite ready to play its part with John and Betty. Under normal circumstances, married persons cannot adopt platonism through prudential or selfish motives without spoiling their love. But passion is the fruit, and not the cause of true love; and, since neither John nor Betty was inspired by selfish motives, their affection increased steadily. It was pathetic to see the way in which they haunted each other's society—at first with some excuse, such as "I want to see you about this," or "I wish to ask you about that"—and then without any excuse, except the unspoken understanding that they were friends and liked to be together.

You ask why these two did not break down the barrier?

My dear sir, if you were formally married to a maiden whom you loved intensely, and you believed that she was heart and soul in love with another man, and you (please stretch your imagination) were sufficiently Oriental in your ideas of self-sacrifice to plan suicide as the only way of setting her free, would you dare to risk the slightest familiarity?

And you, my dear madam, if you were a girl of twenty-one, and were married to a man like John Tracey——?

Is not it perfectly self-evident that whenever Betty began to be a tiny bit affectionate—and she did now and again—that John would at once put it down to her sweetness or trust or innocence, and that he would draw himself into his shell lest he should be tempted to forget himself? And is not it self-evident that this would immediately react on Betty like a spray of iced water?

Of course any humanist could tell you that a platonic affection between two persons who were physically attracted to each other must break down; and that, sooner or later, something would be bound to happen which would show John that

Betty's love was not platonic, and that her affections were centred on him alone; but the danger lay in the fact that the "sooner" must be sooner than his self-destruction, for the "later" would be too late.

January and February were past, the house party was just over, and John sat thinking in his study. Betty had gone to bed, tired out, and Father Thrapstone would not arrive until the following day, so for this one evening Tracey was alone.

His guests had disappointed him. Men whom he had thought keen and clever, ten years ago, had become selfish and blasé; the women had lost their refinement; in short, his old friends had developed into a really smart clique, with argot and horse-play and morals to match. But his thoughts passed over these, and fixed themselves on his wife and Courtenay.

He had been seeking for trouble, and therefore he had found trouble. He had expected to see Betty and Courtenay drawn together, and therefore he had seen them drawn together. He had overlooked the fact that Betty had nothing in common with the St. Cyre and Foresythe set, whilst the St. Cyre and Foresythe people had practically ignored their hostess; and he had failed to realise that

Betty had turned to Courtenay for companionship, only because she had no one else to turn to.

John hunted out a tin of fine Japanese tobacco and one of those small Oriental pipes which hold just enough to punctuate the periods in a train of thought, and smoked a pipeful. Yes! He liked Courtenay and had found him cheery, unassuming, and honestly devoted to Betty. He wondered whether the pain which he suffered, as he thought of these two, was jealousy; and he concluded (after much introspection) that, since he liked the one, loved the other, and wished to do his best for both, it could not be actual jealousy; but he concluded that his feelings might easily develop into jealousy, and that it was full time for him to take his intended step.

He seemed to hear two voices—one arguing like his father's, and urging him to face the troubles which had been sent him and bear them bravely—the other recalling the Tracey curse, and reminding him that he was a man, that his life was his own, and that he had no right to bring misery on her who was dearest to him. Following the Shinto rule, which bade him submit these whisperings to the infallible test of conscience, he saw that the second voice was infallibly right.

For a time he indulged in regrets, wondering

what would have happened if he had met Betty ten or twelve years ago, and picturing the change that the meeting might have made in his life, and wondering what would have happened now if there had been no Courtenay in the background. He knew that he had attracted the girl during their first acquaintance, and that she had felt a strong friendship towards him, and he wondered if this might not have grown into something that was warmer. Then he realised that these thoughts were unwholesome, mixed himself a night-cap, lit a cigar, and fell to work making plans for the end.

To start with, Betty must be left without the slightest suspicion of his suicide—that is to say, his conduct must not be distant, or moody, or even thoughtful. He was devoted to her, she knew of his devotion, and it would be wise for him to show his devotion; for if she saw him both devoted and happy, she would not imagine he wished for death; so long as he avoided any physical caress, he might even venture to be affectionate. He remembered how, on that first September morning after he had met her, he had come home and planned that their friendship should be a pleasant comedy. Well, it had not been a comedy, and he did not mean it to end in a tragedy. It should be drama, and since drama is strongest when it is acted

naturally, he would act naturally. He would say what he thought (with reservations) and he would behave as he felt (with reservations); he would throw himself into his part, and—— John smiled, for he found himself looking forward to the last act with an absurd interest, and, as such a state of mind did not seem normal, he took a prescribed dose of the sleeping draught, for the first time, and went off to bed.

As intellects go, John Tracey was no fool; but, like ninety-nine men out of a hundred, he reasoned without testing the foundations on which he built his reasoning. This is a common error with most historians, many scientists, and nearly all controversialists. Some "fact" is accepted without question; on this a perfectly logical argument is erected, ending in a perfectly logical conclusion—the only fault being that the "fact" is often fancy, and the premises rotten.

Tom Courtenay's letter had said that Betty loved him during their engagement, and that Betty was not the sort of girl to love and then change her mind. Betty herself had said in desperation: "Do you think I'd have accepted him unless I'd liked him?" On these sketchy premises John had founded his arguments and planned to play Destiny.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE INFLUENCE OF THE BOOK

DURING the night the "datura" acted up to its reputation, producing first unconsciousness, and then a deep natural sleep from which John woke up thoroughly refreshed; so he came down to breakfast in his brightest spirits, with a firm determination to say what he thought, act as he felt, and behave naturally.

He kissed Betty, helped himself to some grilled sole, and passed her a pile of letters with an admonition to read, mark, and answer them, for he intended to be busy.

"Do you realise what we have done, Betty?" he asked.

"No!" answered she, noticing a difference in his manner.

"We've finished our book, and it's a real good book too!"

"So we have!" she replied, smiling happily.

"I don't believe you realise a bit what we've

done, little woman. You and I have written an absolutely original book in a little over two months—two months and five days, to be exact. It's nothing short of a miracle!"

There was a new ring in John's voice, a new look in his face: or, rather, the John whom Betty had first known seemed to have come back to her. She wondered if the completion of the book could have made this alteration; if so, the result of the miracle was far more miraculous than the miracle itself.

"Hawkins once told me," continued Tracey, "that anyone who makes a series of different efforts—articles, short stories, and so on—can get through a tremendous amount of work; but that if the same man were to make one big continuous effort—that's to say, a book—he could hardly hope to average more than five hundred words a day. Of course, that includes alterations and re-writing."

She borrowed her husband's pencil, and made some calculations on the back of one of the envelopes. "December, thirty-one days; January, thirty-one plus five; that makes sixty-seven," she read. "Then, take off four days for the house party—you didn't do any work for at least four days——"

“Steady! Hawkins meant to include off-days in the average. The book won’t be finished until this morning. Call it sixty-eight days.”

“Well, sixty-eight days into eighty-one thousand words—I counted them up yesterday—that’s one thousand one hundred and ninety words a day. John, you’ve actually averaged one thousand one hundred and ninety words a day!”

“Have I?” he answered dryly. “I rather thought that you wrote the book!”

“Don’t tease!” she answered, blushing. “I know I did interfere an awful lot; but,” she laughed, making a face at him, “you encouraged me—it was your fault!”

“Don’t you see, darling,” he explained, taking hold of her hand that held the pencil. “I’ve been thinking over the subject of the Japanese character for years, and I simply wrote down my thoughts in a sort of logical sequence; then you came and split up the paragraphs for me, and altered the sentences until they were readable. That’s re-writing the book; it’s almost the most difficult part, and, if I’d had to do it, I should have taken quite a twelve-month over the job, and done it badly in the end. The subject matter may be mine, but the literary part’s yours; it’s our book.”

"I never thought——" she stammered. "Do you really mean——?"

John took the pencil from her and wrote on the back of the envelope: "Japanese Character from an English Standpoint, by Betty and John Tracey." "That's the title," he said.

"No!" she cried, recapturing the pencil and writing: "Japanese Character from an English Standpoint, by John and Betty Tracey!" "You wrote the book and I only helped; you must play the game! Oh, John! I am proud!"

"I formulate and you revise, even to the end!" he laughed.

Then, since 1908 had been a year of limerick competitions, he added:

"There once was a lady, and she
Revised for her husband, John T——;
She's twisted my title,
Until it is frightful,
Through sheer, cussed consistency!"

Betty raised her chin, and looked at her husband with a divine impudence that set him on flame. Then she chanted her reply:

"There once was a sweet girl who'd got,
As her husband, a Don Quixo-ot.
He'd preach, argue and twirl,
Till he'd made this sweet girl—
Perfectly miserable! No! I suppose I must rhyme:
Amazed at his altruist rot!—There!"

What with her look and her limerick, and with his new-formed resolution to behave naturally, John felt his brain turning, and he knew that within a few moments he would catch Betty into his arms or do something equally foolish; so, with an excuse that he must start his work choosing the pictures for the illustration of the book, he kissed Betty's hand, and went off to his study.

Instinctively locking his study door after him, he threw himself into his easy chair. By Jove! if he had yielded to his mad impulse and embraced Betty as he wanted to——! He took out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead.

What a fool he had nearly made of himself! For Betty's limerick had been sheer light-hearted nonsense, and her look had been the look that any excited girl might have given the man who had just finished writing a book with her. If he had kissed Betty, and she had shrunk away from him—he could almost see her shrinking from him with a half-pained, half-disgusted expression—he dared not have carried out his plans for weeks lest she should suspect that he was not happy and imagine suicide. It must have been the effects of the "datura" that had upset him! Damn the "datura"! Then, with an effort, he got out his portfolio of pictures chosen

out for the final selection, unlocked the door, and set to work.

The publisher's original suggestion, that he should use the illustrations to show the influence of Buddhism on the Arts of Japan, had made John smile; for the idea was such an obvious inversion of horse and cart. He turned over the manuscript so as to refresh his mind and to see exactly what he had written. Yes! his heading of the chapter was right—"The Influence of the Japanese Temperament on Buddhist Art"—and the commencement of the chapter was satisfactory:

"If an Essay on Nature—that is to say the elaboration of some phase of Nature such as the Majesty of the storm thundering amongst the pine-trees, or some aspect of Nature such as the Purity of the lotus rising above the dark-toned waters—if an Essay on Nature be the ideal in Art; then Buddhism may be called the Religion of Art. For Buddhism is an Essay on Nature, with man as the essayist.

"In the highest state, the human soul becomes merged in the great principle of life; but, in the highest earthly state, the almost perfect man becomes the friend of the pine-tree, the brother of the sambur, with the feeding ducks as his little sisters

—for these same ducks may be the transmigrated souls of fellow Buddhists who have quacked away their human probation in aimless chatter—and these same ducks may live so worthily that their souls will migrate from state to state, until they finally pass from the perfect man into the divine essence.”

John paused to smile, for the sentence about the Buddhists quacking away their probation in aimless chatter had been Betty's, and her touch pleased him. How aimless this Buddhist idea of almost endless transmigration, only to be absorbed into the essence and lose all individuality, seemed when compared with the more virile creed of Shinto!

“From Chinese Buddhism Japan derived her Art and almost immediately stamped it with her own characteristics. Whether the ideals remained true to the original Buddhist conception, whether they became lost in the cult of the sword and the doings of heroes, or whether they degenerated into the picturing of tea-house and theatre, the expression became very human and indescribably dainty.

“Is the Buddha less lofty because he has become endowed with a sense of humour? Is the hero less noble because he has quaint dealings with demons?

Are the incidents of the highway and the fascinations of the geisha the worse for refinement of treatment? ”

Tracey felt that his work had been made very simple for him.

He must start his book with examples of the original Buddhist ideals, and he could not do better than pick out four or five of his superbly dignified Chinese paintings for reproduction. He must go on to show the Japanese Buddhist development in the painting of Saints and the rendering of Nature. Next he must illustrate the Shinto movement in praise of doughty deeds, chivalry, and patriotism. Lastly he must show the popular movement which is known as “The School of the Mirror of the Passing World.”

So the morning passed; and anyone who has chosen a couple of dozen pictures out of a large number—honestly considering the pros and cons—will understand that the four hours between breakfast and lunch passed very rapidly. Lunch was spent in the discussion of the various methods of reproduction, of which John knew nothing and Betty far less. The afternoon was devoted to the drafting of a descriptive list of illustrations, over which John

and Betty grew as thick as thieves; and, towards evening, Father Thrapstone came.

He came like a breath of something wholesome—iodine or eucalyptus—and he was taken into the heart of the family, and the three talked of such wholesome things as politics, naval reform, the King of Spain, and history. After dinner they retired to the library, and John brought out the pictures he had chosen as the illustrations of his book.

“Honestly, I don’t like these things,” said Father Thrapstone, after he had examined about a dozen. “I do not pretend to understand them, and they do not appeal to me. How shall I state my case——? The pictures seem to me to be lifeless.”

“Perhaps it’s the shadows and shading that you miss?” suggested John. “There are neither shadows nor shading in Oriental Art.”

Father Thrapstone took up one of the paintings and examined it carefully. “Yes!” he said with a chuckle. “I knew there was something wrong!”

“May not the shadows and shading in pictures which are painted on a flat surface be wrong?”

“O! ye shades (and shadings) of Raphael!” laughed the Jesuit. “This is a revolutionary idea of yours, John Tracey!”

Tracey helped himself to a fresh cigarette, and passed the box to Father Thrapstone. "The subject is a big one," he owned, "and there is something to be said on both sides; but, starting with the Ancient Egyptians, the whole of the Eastern artists shrank from painting any suggestion of shading on a flat surface. They felt that it gave a spurious illusion of bas-relief. But I'll show you exactly what I mean."

He hunted out a small drawing of a geisha—explaining that the sketch had been made by an Englishman, in imitation of the Japanese manner, and was consequently singularly flat. Then he made a tracing in pencil, shaded in some rough shading, and handed the two drawings to the Jesuit.

"I quite see that this particular design will not bear shading and shadow," acknowledged Father Thrapstone, determined to advocate his cause; "but that does not show that Velasquez, Raphael, and the other great ones were wrong. Look at Mrs. Tracey! Half her face is in shadow, the rest is shaded."

"My wife may be a 'perfect picture,' your reverence; but Mrs. Tracey is not depicted on a flat surface."

"What he's trying to say," explained Betty, "is

—that I'm more like a living statue—you can walk round me and examine the back. I think he's also trying to pay me a compliment, but I'm not quite certain."

Father Thrapstone chuckled softly to himself: Mrs. Tracey was evidently a person after his heart.

"What I was trying to say," continued John, "when my wife interrupted me, was that if a Japanese were making a statue of Mrs. Tracey, he would aim at full modelling and full relief; but if he were painting her, he would consider that he was translating her portrait on to a flat surface, and try to keep the flatness of the surface. A Japanese of the old school would consider half the European paintings to be imitations of bas-relief, he would consider the rest as rather vulgar attempts to imitate a view seen through an open window. I hope I'm not boring you!"

"I have noticed," answered the Jesuit, "that a man never asks whether he is boring one, unless he is certain that his conversation is particularly interesting."

"When a European speaks of the Japanese work as being decorative, he shows that he does not understand his subject. Of course, all Japanese painting

is decorative; but this is not the quality that the painter has aimed at. The particular quality in the true Japanese painting is its literary character."

Father Thrapstone sighed. "One must not look for realism? One must not look for truthfulness? One must not look for decoration? But one must look for a certain something which you call 'literary character'? The whole idea sounds rather mad!"

John chose out three or four of the paintings. "Notice the absolute fidelity in the drawing of these flowers and in the detail of those carp! Notice the wonderful realism of this impressionist sketch of frogs swimming in a brook! You may take it for granted that every Japanese artist can copy Nature with greater fidelity and realism than any European. Will you take my word for it?"

"Yes!" answered the priest, throwing the end of his cigarette into the fire.

"And I think you will accept the decorative quality of the pictures I have shown you?"

"Certainly!"

"The Japanese first trains himself to observe with absolute accuracy, and to draw from a faultless memory; then he cultivates an appreciation of what we call 'the inwardness of Nature.' It is this

inwardness of Nature that he tries to paint." John smoked in silence, collecting his thoughts for his last clause in his argument.

"Forget painting, and think of writing for a moment, Father Thrapstone," he continued. "In writing, any trained journalist could describe the actual stages of a sunset or the mist stealing up the valley, with great accuracy; but it would require more than this quality of observation to make either a poem or an essay. The poet or essayist must possess intense powers of sympathy, understanding, and idealism. What the poet or essayist aims at in his writing, the Japanese artist aims at in his painting."

"I am beginning to perceive the inwardness of your argument," owned the Jesuit.

"I think you will see it when you read his book," said Betty, gently; and she let her hand touch John's for one second.

Betty had retired to her room, had clothed herself in a new and glorious kimono which her husband had unearthed when hunting out his pictures, and was preparing to do her hair. She had sent her maid to bed, for her day had been so happy that she wished to be alone with her thoughts, and

dream that everything was coming right between herself and John.

There was a knock at the door and, thinking that it was the maid, she did not trouble to turn round. Then she saw the reflection of John's face in the looking-glass.

"Oh!" she cried, for it was the first time that her husband had come into her bedroom since they were back at Tracey. Then she added hastily: "I'm so glad you came up. I wanted to tell you what an awfully happy day I've had. How do you like my kimono?"

"It's put on wrong!" answered he. He knew that he was playing with fire; but his time was getting short, and he could not resist seeing Betty for one minute after their happy day together.

"How?" asked she.

"You see, a kimono should be fastened from left to right," he explained. "The left side should lap over the right, so that when you walk the folds sweep from left to right—that's why Japanese women look so graceful."

"Would—you—mind—doing it up for me—properly? That's if it wouldn't be too much trouble." She was all demureness: butter would not have melted in her mouth.

She seemed to have been winning all day; she felt his hands trembling as he did up the folds of the kimono, and his arrangement of the obi came perilously near an embrace; and now, all that was sweet and womanly in her rose to the surface, and she resolved to win her battle. "Would you like to stay whilst I brush my hair?" asked Betty.

"Yes!" answered Tracey, huskily.

She removed the hairpins, and her hair fell round her like a cope of gold.

Now, a cloth-of-gold cope is the least becoming vestment in the world, and (although no woman seems able to realise this) the cloak of a woman's hair is but little more becoming. In its natural state, when the separate hairs blend into locks, each lock tapering gracefully, the fall of a woman's hair may be as graceful as a field of meadow-grass; but when the hair has been trimmed and tended, until each hair hangs separately and the ends grow thick and level, it is no more beautiful than a fortnight's growth of grass on a tennis lawn. Besides, since women wear their hair up and children wear theirs down, a woman with her hair down looks as though she were aping a child.

John felt all this; he felt his blood return to its normal pressure; and he ventured to sit on, chatting

about the book, Father Thrapstone, and their conversation.

Then Betty began to plait her hair—and, as she plaited, she seemed to resume her womanhood; but this time her beauty struck him in a new and more personal sense, just as though he were being admitted to the intimacy of his wife's toilet.

“I wonder what you remind me of?” he said dreamily. “Is it a Margherita?”

She shook her head, for the piece of ribbon with which she was going to tie her hair was between her lips.

“It's something I have seen,” he continued—“something very beautiful.”

She removed the ribbon from her lips, and tied the end of her first plait, glancing at him rather nervously.

“No!” he muttered. “It isn't that—it's—it's Botticelli's Venus—the one with the plaits.”

Do what she would, the girl could not help her face growing crimson, and a feeling of excessive shyness coming over her. Everything was so strange and so totally unlike anything she could have imagined.

Then, making a violent effort, John pulled himself together: for Betty's blushes and Betty's

embarrassment had reached his dulled brain. He rose, and with a brave attempt at a smile, kissed her gently on the forehead and left the room.

As he passed through the hall, Peter got off his mat and followed him into the study.

"Oh! what an ass I've made of myself, Peter!" said John, picking up Peter in his arms. "After keeping my head for months, and after making your mistress feel herself absolutely safe with me——! Mustn't trust myself a day longer, Peter!"

Peter did his best to do what many a Tracey spaniel had done before, and tried to comfort his master.

CHAPTER XXX

EXPERT ADVICE

As soon as breakfast was finished, John Tracey had gone into Exeter to inspect a motor which he had ordered—when one intends to take an overdose of sleeping draught at night, it is wise to plan openly for the future during the day—so Betty was left alone with Father Thrapstone.

The moment her husband had started for Exeter, Betty had put on a pair of stout boots and taken Peter for a swim in the river; but she had found that, although the sound of running water may be a comfort to the worried, it becomes a torture to the introspective.

Why had not she left well alone? Why had not she been content with the very perfect comradeship that had sprung up between herself and John? Now she could not meet his eyes without blushing.

Everything had been going so happily! At least three times during yesterday he had seemed within an ace of making love to her and had ended by coming up to her bedroom to kiss her good-night.

Then she had taken the initiative, had asked him to do up what was practically her dressing-gown, and had invited him to stay whilst she went on with her toilet, and he had left her with a kiss on the forehead. She could never! never! never! place herself in a similar position!

She wondered what could be the reason of John's conduct. Of course she knew that Tom Courtenay's letter had first upset him; but he had said that Tom had behaved well afterwards, and he had seemed to like him when he stayed at Tracey. It must be something to do with Shinto self-denial—and yet she knew nothing in the Shinto doctrine that would meet the case.

How she wished she could ask some very wise person to advise her! If she had been born a Catholic, she might have gone into the confessional and consulted Father Thrapstone; but naturally this was out of the question. Anyhow, she might have a talk with him about Shinto, and she would do so at once.

As Betty entered the morning-room, the Jesuit was saying his Office; he finished the remaining verses of the psalm that he was reading, took off his spectacles—placing them between the leaves of the Breviary to mark his place—laid the book

beside him on the window-seat, and smiled at Betty. "I hope you have enjoyed your walk?" he asked.

"I want to have a talk with you, Father Thrapstone," began Betty with determination.

"Yes?" he answered, settling himself more comfortably in his chair.

"I want you to tell me what you think about my husband's religion."

"What was it that St. Monica said about her son—something about a child of so many prayers not being lost—was not it? There are a great many persons who are praying for John Tracey!"

"Isn't your answer rather cautious?" suggested Betty.

He laughed softly to himself, and answered her question with another: "Do you remember my saying that I always thought of the story of the bloaters charging up the hill, whenever I mentioned your husband during Mass?"

"Yes!" said Betty.

"That story gives the keynote of his bringing up. He was brought up in a sanctimonious atmosphere—an unhealthy atmosphere. Even though he might have confused bloaters with soldiers, a healthy boy ought not to have pictured the soldiers

charging up the hill with a fervent prayer! A healthy boy would have written 'Shouting their battle-cry, the bloaters charged up the hill.' You can form no idea of the importance of a boy's early education. That is why I always ask Almighty God to remember your husband's bringing up, hence the memory of bloaters. I always consider that your husband's education is responsible for his loss of faith."

"I was not thinking so much of his loss of Christianity," explained Betty. "I was wondering what you thought of Shinto."

"It is a most original religion for an Englishman to adopt," he replied with a smile.

"Why?" asked Betty.

As his answer, the Jesuit took up one of the photographs which John had brought home with him and handed it to the girl. "The peacock, amidst its natural surroundings," he remarked, "is a very graceful bird; but Peter," and he pointed out of the window to where Peter, the peacock, was posing on the terrace, "often looks positively ridiculous. Now, take any Japanese religious custom and you will find it graceful; but place the same custom amongst English surroundings and it loses its proportions. For instance, the custom of providing a

small cup of *sake* and a small bowl of rice, so that the ancestors may feed on the ethereal essence, is quite graceful; but place a small whisky-and-soda and a small portion of roast beef with trimmings on a shelf, for the repast of one's departed relatives, and the ceremony becomes an absurdity."

"But," protested Betty, "isn't it rather hard to condemn Shinto on these grounds?"

"Patience, Mrs. Tracey! I am only trying to show that it would be an original religion for an Englishman to adopt, because the essentials of custom and society in the two countries are different. Take hara-kiri, for example; under certain circumstances, self-destruction would be approved of by a man's relations and leave a legacy of honour to a man's wife and children; in England, suicide would be committed secretly, and the man would have no idea what a legacy of sorrow and disgrace he might leave to those who were dearest to him."

"It would be awful!" she cried.

"Now, to come to my point," continued the priest, growing more earnest. "A Catholic believes that the spirits of such of his ancestors as would wish to do him a spiritual evil go to a place where their influence is powerless; he believes that his good ancestors go where their prayers on his behalf have

far more power for good than is conceivable under Shinto."

"But how?" asked Betty.

"The father of a Japanese dies, and his spirit is said to make wise suggestions; my father is dead, and he prays The Eternal Wisdom to guide me into His Wisdom. Again, the Japanese offers rice and *sake* to the spirit of his father; I offer prayers and Masses that the spirit of my father may have the fulness of eternal happiness. But we must remember that your husband had an unusual education, and that he believes in that absurd 'Book of the Traceys.'"

"Do you believe Shinto could have had any influence on my husband's life?" Betty felt that she was reaching her point with great diplomacy.

"That is a very wide question," answered Father Thrapstone, smiling. "Could not you specialise?"

"On his ideas——" Her pause was the perfection of diplomacy. "On his ideas about marriage, for instance."

"No!"

Here was a complete deadlock! And yet, as Betty looked at the Jesuit's face, she felt that instinctive impulse which prompts children and maidens to turn

to old people who have led singularly sweet and pure lives. Besides, she was wretched enough to try any remedy.

"I suppose people who aren't Catholics sometimes ask your advice?"

"Dozens!" answered Father Thrapstone.

"And I suppose what they tell you is absolutely private?"

"If you were to tell me that you had murdered Gill and hidden his body in the rhododendrons," he answered merrily, "I should not even look shocked when I met you at lunch."

"But there is something," she said; "and—it's awfully difficult to tell."

His manner changed, and he became serious without becoming grave. "Perhaps that is why God sent me here," he suggested.

"It's awfully difficult to tell," she repeated.

He got up and took one of John's cigarettes from the box on the mantelpiece—this poor child should not think that she was in the confessional; and he seated himself so that his face was in the light, whilst hers was in the shadow. She must see that he was neither trying to spy out her emotions, nor that he was shocked at anything she might tell him.

"Now please remember," he said, "that everything you tell me is strictly confidential, and that I shall not ever refer to it again unless you wish me to."

Bit by bit her story came out; and, whenever she was at a loss, he seemed to know exactly what she wanted to say; and the strange part of it all was—but she never realised this till afterwards—that Betty did not feel the least atom shy. Also, from time to time, she heard him mutter "Poor child!" which comforted her.

"Now," he said, when she had finished, "let us try to get at the root of the matter and find the remedy. First let us eliminate the idea that he considers the marriage invalid—that scruple must have been killed by Mr. Courtenay's letter which you showed him at Florence."

"Yes!" said Betty.

"Have you ever thought about that wretched 'Book of the Traceys'?"

"No!" said Betty.

"If my memory serves me right, and I have argued enough about that book with old Mr. Tracey to know it by heart, 'The Book of the Traceys' records that every third Tracey had cause to be jealous of his wife. That starts your husband with

the preconceived notion of jealousy. Do you follow? ”

Betty nodded her head.

“ Let us try to reconstruct the case from your husband’s standpoint,” he continued. “ I understand that Mr. Courtenay was not wealthy, and I assume that he is good-looking? ”

“ Yes! ” said Betty.

“ Your husband marries you after what appears to have been a rather unusual engagement on both sides; he then discovers that you were engaged to a good-looking man of your own age, that you had only broken off your first engagement after he had proposed to you, and that you had not even been released from your first engagement. You follow me so far? ”

She gave a sigh, for she was beginning to see the obvious deduction.

“ Your husband knows that Mr. Courtenay was not well off, and concludes that your first engagement must have been one of disinterested affection; he knows that he himself is exceedingly well off, with a fine position in society; he knows that he is many years your senior; he has also been brought up to expect an unhappy marriage——”

“ You mean that he was jealous? ” cried Betty.

"It appears so," answered Father Thrapstone, dryly.

"But I married him! Oh! how could he?"

"Gently! Mrs. Tracey. Thousands of girls have broken off their engagements to penniless men whom they could never marry, in order to marry richer men who were not distasteful to them."

She sat there biting her lips. This new idea seemed very hateful to her.

"Of course, I can understand that you would not have married John Tracey unless you loved him entirely," he went on gently; "but do you know anything about jealousy? Have you ever been jealous?"

"No!" she answered miserably.

"Then you can have no idea what a crafty disease it is! It is almost always unreasonable, magnifying little things, and overtaking great and obvious things. Has your husband ever given you cause to suspect jealousy?"

"He has been sweet to me," she sighed.

"Then think how he must have suppressed his feelings, and how they must have tormented him!"

"But——" she commenced, and her voice had a hard ring in it.

"I know exactly what you feel," he protested,

“that jealousy implies a suspicion; but this is not so! Your husband has a chivalrous disposition, and if he once imagined that you were in love with Mr. Courtenay—and what you have told me about Mr. Courtenay’s letter is quite sufficient to have given him such an impression—he might well have imagined that any intimate attentions from himself would be distasteful to you. He might well have persuaded himself that you were over-persuaded into your marriage.”

The pair of them sat thinking for some minutes.

“The matter which puzzles me,” remarked Father Thrapstone, “is the matter of your husband’s intentions: he cannot mean that you two should continue in your present state for an indefinite time! Perhaps,” he added hopefully, “he means to wait for a time, and then to commence his courtship *de novo*.”

“I didn’t tell you that he came up to my room to say good-night last night—and I asked him to arrange my kimono—and—asked him to stay whilst I did my hair—and——”

“Oh!” muttered the Jesuit. He did not like the present situation, and he could not quite tell why. “Have you ever told him how much you cared for him?” he asked presently. “I suppose that so

soon as you knew how deeply he loved you, and how deeply you loved him, it would have been impossible for you to marry Mr. Courtenay. Is not this a fact?"

"Yes!" she sighed.

"Then tell him so, Mrs. Tracey! Tell him how much you care for him!"

"He is so difficult! And——"

"Yes! Yes! I know you will find it hard! But there is such a thing as mock-modesty, and there is a shame that brings honour. Remember that you have right on your side. And," he added, rising, "remember that your action will be very modest in God's sight."

He heard her give a deep sigh.

"Now, I am going to take a turn on the terrace and leave you to think matters over," concluded Father Thrapstone, as he moved towards the door. "Do not forget how much you care for your husband and how much he cares for you—and, above all, remember that you are the only person who can set this affair right." He paused, with his hand on the door-handle, and looked back: "If I can ask God to remember your husband's unfortunate bringing up and have patience, I can ask his wife to be equally merciful."

Father Thrapstone took several turns on the terrace, walking rapidly to accelerate his circulation, then he leant over the balustrade and felt in his pocket for a cigar. It was contrary to his custom, this smoking before lunch; but great evils need desperate remedies, and great problems need drastic methods of solution—the cigar which he produced was one of those long, dark Italian abominations, with a straw down the centre, and drastic enough to solve any problem. He lit it carefully.

First he tried the logical method of elimination: it was absurd to imagine that John Tracey could contemplate a married life of perpetual celibacy—such a scheme would be too unjust towards Mrs. Tracey. After what Betty had told him about her last night's throwing down of the glove the idea of a year's platonism, with a subsequent courtship and honeymoon, was equally absurd. He could think of no other worthy subject of elimination, and he found himself left with no tangible remainder. So he started another method.

He tried to imagine himself John Tracey, with Tracey's strange education, Tracey's strange code of ethics, Tracey's keen sense of honour, and the fear of the Tracey luck. He was married to a girl whom he loved intensely, and discovered that she

was equally in love with a younger man. Perhaps she had been persuaded into the marriage. What should he do?

Should he take what the gods had sent him? A coarser man might do so, but not he, John Tracey! For was not sensual passion simply loathsome, unless it were refined by true and mutual affection? Besides, there was the girl to think of. What should he do?

The subject that he had just been talking about—hara-kiri—flashed into his mind. Faugh!—an Englishman—the idea was too monstrous! And, yet, was not John Tracey an Englishman with Japanese ethics? And if he removed himself without any scandal, would not he leave Betty free to marry the man she had set her heart on? And would not he be removing the unfortunate Traceys with their wretched curse? The Jesuit remembered what Betty had told him about her husband teaching her to manage the estate; and, flinging his cigar on the terrace, Father Thrapstone hurried towards the house.

“Well?” asked he, as he entered the morning-room.

“I have made up my mind,” said Betty, coming forward to meet him, and holding out both her

hands. "I will do what you advise, but," and she gave a nervous laugh, "whatever shall I say?"

"I am only a foolish old man," answered the Jesuit.

"After what you've advised me?"

"But I am not foolish enough to attempt to teach a woman tact. But, you'll strike whilst the iron's hot, Mrs. Tracey?"

"Yes!" she answered.

"You might wait until we have retired to-night, and see your husband in his study?"

"I will!" she promised.

Father Thrapstone gave a sigh of relief, for he was anxious not to breathe his suspicions to Betty.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE PREPARATION

JOHN TRACEY went to Exeter with a set purpose. Incidentally, he intended to bring home his new motor if it were ready; incidentally, he proposed to lunch at the Devon and Exeter Club and show himself; incidentally, he proposed to buy something for Betty; but his real quest was a blue, three-cornered eight-ounce bottle. For, if he meant to make a mistake in his sleeping-draught, he must provide a bottle for the diluted mixture that was a reasonable match to the one which held the concentrated extract of "datura."

Now the shopping town of Exeter consists of practically one street: outside this street, John was as much a stranger as he would have been in Birmingham. So he sought out chemists in by-streets and side-streets and told them to make up a certain lotion for curing the mange in dogs. It was a poisonous lotion, and might reasonably be put up in special bottles; and, since the present poison act had not come into force, he had not to give his

name and address. He got bottles that were green or white, one square bottle that was blue—this he kept; twice he had to take the tram and walk until he found a country lane, where he could empty his pockets and stamp the bottles to pieces. Finally he secured a blue, three-cornered bottle which was a match to the one which contained the “datura.” Then he went to lunch.

After lunch, Tracey visited the garage and found that, although the motor was ready, there was an indefinite something wrong with the carburation, and that it would be wise to leave the car until it had been tuned to suit the heavy Devonshire climate; so he returned by train and walked home from the station. When he was half-way up the drive, he took a path which had been made as a short cut.

There is a small runnel of water which crosses this path, and when John had reached it, he stopped, listened, and, taking out the two bottles of dog lotion, placed them in the water so as to soak off the labels—the evening had already fallen and he had to work by sense of touch, but the darkness made him safe from inquisitive eyes. He then emptied the contents of the three-cornered bottle and floated the cork down the stream—listening care-

fully all the while—washed out the bottle, and returned the empty three-cornered bottle and the full square bottle to his pockets. He felt that if, during the inquest, there should be any question about the bottle which had contained the sleeping-draught, he had covered his tracks.

When he arrived at the house, he handed the full bottle to Gill, telling him to give the lotion to Weymouth with directions that it must be rubbed on Patience, night and morning, and that, since it was poison, Patience must be kept muzzled. He left the empty bottle in his coat pocket, judging that the thick homespun would prevent the bottle from bumping when Gill hung up the overcoat. Then he went to the drawing-room.

Have you ever gone out of a very chilly and uncomfortable February evening, after a hard and dispiriting day's work, into a large room warmed by a bright wood fire and lit by a few shaded wax candles? Have you ever entered such a room, and found it occupied by two other persons whose hearts were warm towards you? If so, you will understand what Tracey felt as he entered the drawing-room.

Betty did not rise to meet him as she would have done yesterday or the day before; she held out the

hand that was nearest him, took his hand, and placed it against her cheek.

"Oh! you poor, cold thing!" she said.

"I'm not really cold!" he explained. "It's only my hands. I walked back from the station. The motor isn't quite ready; its mixture's wrong—or the ignition—or something."

"And what have you brought?" asked she, still holding his hand against her cheek and looking up at him. It was their rule that the one who went into Exeter should bring back something interesting.

He put his free hand in his coat pocket and, bringing out a large box, dropped it on her lap. He moved his imprisoned hand until the back of it stroked her cheek gently. "Marrons glacés and preserved violets," said he.

"You darling!"

John's heart gladdened, because the last night's awkwardness was evidently forgiven, and he did not want to leave her with any hard thoughts in her mind about him.

"I also brought some lotion for poor Patience," he added.

"Who is Patience?" inquired the Jesuit.

"She's a little girl spaniel," explained Betty. "She's always been delicate, and has lately dis-

graced our kennels by developing mange—goodness knows how—and it would break Weymouth's heart to lose her. Anything else, John?"

"If you'll kindly let go my hand—thanks!" and he dropped a small box where he had dropped the chestnuts.

"Oh, you dear!" she cried, holding up a delicate ring set with a circle of very small diamonds.

"I think it's a ring made by one of the French *émigrés*," he remarked, seating himself on the arm of his wife's chair. "There were several of them who became jewellers in these parts. I found it at Phillipps, in the High Street."

"Stoop down!" said Betty; and she put her arm round his neck and held up her lips.

Before he had realised what he was doing, he had kissed them.

"I must be going," he muttered, flushing scarlet. "I've some letters to write. Gill can bring my tea into the study."

"You wonder-worker!" said Betty, turning to Father Thrapstone, as the door closed after her husband. "You've made everything so easy for me!"

The Jesuit smiled at her, and, taking off his spectacles, wiped them. "You rather gave me the im-

pression that I had involved you in a delicate and difficult piece of diplomacy," he answered. "But, as I said, I am not foolish enough to imagine that I understand women."

"Oh! that was only my pride!" she explained airily. "It passed in a minute."

"So I supposed! But if you would explain how I have made everything so easy for you, Mrs. Tracey, I should be grateful. The situation has a psychological interest."

"When I knew I loved him, and he was so strange," she said meditatively, "everything was almost impossible. But the moment I knew that he loved me and thought I didn't love him—— You understand?"

"Perfectly!" he answered, with a chuckle. "But," and he grew grave, "you will speak to him to-night, so soon as the house is quiet?"

"I will speak to him to-night!" said Betty.

John Tracey sat down at his study-table and buried his face in his hands. She had made it hard for him! It was the first time, since their estrangement, that he had kissed her lips; and the thought of leaving her now was almost unbearable. Suppose, for one moment, that he had been mis-

taken, and that she really cared for him! Suppose that she had got over her love for Courtenay! But what a fool he was! Last night showed him, beyond any possibility of a possible doubt, how she instinctively shrank from anything more than a warm friendship with him. Her sweetness to him, just now in the drawing-room, was her sweetness; the awkwardness, last night in her bedroom, must have shown her how he longed for the natural married life, and she was ready to do her duty ungrudgingly. She had married him, and she was prepared to drink the cup to the dregs. Thank Fate—or whoever muddled things—that last night he had caught her unprepared, and had seen exactly what she felt. It was only five o'clock, and he had to bear his misery another seven hours. Then he heard Gill coming with the tea, and, straightening himself in his chair, pulled the pile of manuscript before him and turned the top half over.

As he sipped his tea, he began to perceive a ray of comfort: Betty always went to bed at ten-thirty, and Father Thrapstone would retire at the same time; at ten-thirty, John was accustomed to go to his study with the standing order that he must not be disturbed. He could save himself an hour and a half of suspense by taking the “datura” the

moment he retired to his study; and next morning, no one could tell whether he had died at half-past ten or midnight. He would save time by making his preparations now.

Placing the bottle of "datura" in his pocket, and fetching the empty bottle from his coat in the hall, he went into the lavatory: there he mixed about a wineglassful of the regulation sleeping-draught and poured it into the empty bottle. He had thrown away the original cork for fear it might contain traces of mercury—or whatever poison they put into dog-lotion—and the question of a cork worried him until he remembered that there was a box of small corks in the gun-room. Then it occurred to him that the doctor would give evidence at the inquest, and that the doctor must have cause to imagine that John had taken the sleeping-draught pretty regularly, and had grown careless. So he emptied most of the drug into the lavatory basin and washed out the basin.

Finally, he returned to the study, wrote "Sleeping Draught" on a small label, gummed the label on the bottle which contained the diluted solution and, placing both bottles in his safe—labels facing inwards—locked the safe door, and sat down at his study-table.

The last sentence in one of the chapters of his manuscript caught his eye:

“The best type of European regards himself as one of the pillars of a building: the pillar must be in good repair, but the pillar is always reparable. The typical Japanese regards himself as a drop of water in a clear lake: the drop may evaporate and it will be replaced by a drop of rain; but the drop must not become muddy, else it will become a source of defilement to the whole. And thus, when personal honour is lost, or even tarnished, and the Japanese becomes a defilement to his country, honour demands that the man shall evaporate into the clouds from whence he came; and by this obedience to the dictates of honour—by this last act of repentance and reparation—the man shall regain his honour.”

“Too general!” muttered Tracey; and, as the page happened to be in his handwriting, not Betty’s, and as there was room for another paragraph, he added:

“To the European gentleman, who is above all things an individualist, the idea of suicide is repug-

nant; for the European regards his honour as part of himself, and, if his honour be lost, he himself must regain his honour. But the Japanese regards his honour as part of his country's honour, and the self-effacement of a dishonourable individual is a cleansing of the country's defilement. 'If thy hand offend thee, cut it off!' is the maxim of the individual Christian. 'Thou art the hand of thy country and if the hand offend, cut it off!' is the maxim of the Shintoist.

"Suicide is no disgrace to the Japanese, no shirking of difficulties, and above all no act of cowardice. If a man should, either wittingly or unwittingly, have become a cause of injury to others, let him remove the cause of injury as a supreme self-sacrifice to the cause of honour."

Then John Tracey laid down his pen, placed the page where it should come in the volume, and lit a cigarette. He knew that the ink would turn black long before his manuscript would be read, and that his last written paragraph would convey no suggestion of his own self-destruction.

He looked at his watch—six-thirty—only four hours more! So, throwing his cigarette in the fire and lighting a cigar, he sought an easy chair and

went over every detail for the last time. Everything seemed in perfect order. Stay! He had forgotten one detail: he must leave a message explaining his mistake. He might write the message now, trying to simulate the writing of a man who was being overcome by the action of the drug; but such writing might not carry conviction. It would be far better to place a pencil in readiness, seize the first piece of paper that came handy—the top page of his manuscript would do—and write as soon as he felt the narcotic overpowering him. He wondered how rapid the action of the “datura” would be—would he have time to write “Have taken the wrong bottle by mistake”? If he could only manage to scrawl “Wrong bottle,” the message would be sufficient.

He would take the drug. He would begin to feel very sleepy and struggle to write the message. Then his head would drop forward over his hands, and he would sink on the table. He would breathe very heavily for some minutes, and lie still. After that——? Well, if there were any truth in the Shinto doctrine, he would be free to do all that a spirit might do for Betty.

There was just time to go into the drawing-room and show himself before he dressed for dinner.

CHAPTER XXXII

AND COUNTER PREPARATION

NINE-TENTHS of those who fail in life, fail through a lack of self-confidence; and Betty's married life had, so far, been one disquieting puzzle. Now that she knew the cause of her husband's strangeness and realised that he loved her intensely, she felt very sure of herself and needed no advice from Father Thrapstone—or from anyone else—to tell her what she should do.

Whilst John was planning in his study, Betty was busy decorating the dinner-table. She had banished all flowers of a pronounced colour from her scheme, and was using the palest of yellow chrysanthemums and the young fronds of maidenhair: if she had not been lavish with the blossoms the general effect would have been poor and anæmic—even as it was, the scheme seemed to need some note of colour to form an accent. When she had finished, she removed the shades from the candles, so that the light might fall on the diners as well as the dinner-table,

and returned to Father Thrapstone in the drawing-room.

“ I have been meaning to ask you a question all day,” she said, settling herself in the most comfortable chair she could find.

“ Yes? ” he answered, and prepared himself to listen.

“ What do you think of ‘ The Book of the Traceys ’? ”

“ I think that it is a very unwholesome book,” he replied cautiously.

“ But, do you think it’s real? ”

“ The parchment is undoubtedly old,” he acknowledged, “ and I have always fancied that some of the earliest entries are genuine; but——”

“ Well? ” she asked, leaning forward.

“ There is a certain morbid book in the library—it is in manuscript and is entitled ‘ The Meditations of Dame Barbara ’—perhaps you know it? ”

She nodded her head, for the same Meditations had given her a very miserable half-hour.

“ Dame Barbara’s Meditations and the record of a certain Thomas Tracey, in ‘ The Book of the Traceys,’ are written in the same handwriting, and both were probably written in the middle of the

eighteenth century. You can draw your own deductions!"

"Please give me your deductions!" she begged.

"The account of Thomas Tracey purports to be written by Thomas Tracey himself. It also states that the aforesaid Thomas was of a pious disposition. He was evidently a scholar, he wrote a beautiful hand, and if he were really guilty of 'The Meditations of Dame Barbara'——" and he chuckled dryly.

"Then you refuse to deduce, Father Thrapstone?" said she, reproachfully.

"A man who was capable of describing himself as 'of a pious disposition' would be capable of anything! But, see here, Mrs. Tracey," he continued; "after to-day, you will be able to do what you like with your husband. Persuade him to send the manuscript to the librarian of the British Museum, with a request for the best possible expert opinion, and a statement that expense would be no object."

"I will!" she cried.

"Because—well—I said just now that 'The Book of the Traceys' was a very unwholesome book—I consider it to be a very dangerous book."

"It might have been written by——" suggested Betty, raising her eyebrows.

"Exactly!" answered he with a gleam of amusement. "You have stated my second reason for desiring an expert opinion. If the manuscript were not forged by poor Thomas Tracey—an original manuscript written by the devil would be of the greatest literary interest." And again the Jesuit chuckled gleefully.

"Father Thrapstone," said Betty, softly, "I can't tell you what you've been to me to-day. I didn't want to dwell on things, and plan what I should say to my husband, and become self-conscious—it would spoil everything; I want to be just myself, and say whatever comes into my head. If you had been earnest and serious—but you haven't! I shall never be able to thank you!"

"It is nothing," answered the Jesuit, nervously. "It is only what one is sent into the world for."

"I know you hate being thanked," she said; "and I'm not going to thank you."

Then Tracey came in from his study and, after some minutes' conversation, Betty retired to gown herself.

Now there are two ways in which a woman may

gown herself: she may dress elaborately in the latest fashion, in which case the dress dominates her; or she may dress to suit her particular style and bring out her personal beauty. Betty chose the wiser course and, in her gown of maize satin—just a shade duller than her hair—cut rather low and made very simply, it was the woman that attracted notice, and not the dress. When she had pinned some yellow chrysanthemums on her shoulder, and was seated at the dinner-table, the whole formed one colour harmony.

It was a strange dinner, and Father Thrapstone felt that he was an onlooker and that onlookers see most of the game.

He could see that John and Betty were playing to one another, and that each was so intent on the part that neither seemed to detect the artificiality in the other. He could understand the confidence with which the girl claimed her husband's admiration, and he knew that she was preparing the way for what she intended to tell him as soon as the servants had gone to bed and the house was quiet; but he could not understand Tracey's behaviour—for, if John believed that Betty cared for Courtenay, he was not the man to flirt with her, and if he had just discovered that he had been mistaken (and that

Betty loved him) he would hardly treat the matter so lightly. All the time, the light from the candles was making Betty's eyes look like sapphires.

Dinner was finished and the coffee had been brought in. Betty had stayed on, as she often did when she and John were dining together.

"How would you like to spend a year in Japan?" suggested Tracey, stirring his coffee. "I've still the cottage—I hadn't the heart to sell it; and everything here's in apple-pie order."

"Do you really mean it?" she asked, with her eyes sparkling.

"Yes!" he answered. "Everything here can be left for at least twelve months." He was glad that he had thought of the plan, for Betty would remember it after his death, and feel that she could go abroad with a clear conscience.

"I should love it!" she said.

"I've been planning a new book." He knew that a man who makes cheerful plans for the future is not likely to be suspected of suicide. "I suppose our book's made me ambitious; but a book written in Japan, describing the country and not the people, would be a fascinating subject to work at."

"John," and she looked at him shyly, "it

sounds heavenly—we'll write the book together, won't we?—it sounds like a bit of paradise."

He was thankful that he had already faced the situation in his study, and that he had seen through Betty's wiles and loved her for them: she had shrank from him last night, and now she was offering herself to him in the noblest spirit of self-sacrifice that a woman could be capable of. He watched her hungrily, resolving to take his step the very moment he retired to his study lest he should be tempted to fall from his path of honour.

"John," she said, and then paused as if to gather up her determination, "John, I've something I want to tell you. Father Thrapstone wanted me to tell you in your study this evening. But as he knows all about it, I'm going to tell you now. It seems straighter."

"Yes," he said, raising his eyebrows, and wondering what on earth was coming.

"Our marriage has been an awful puzzle to me," she continued, speaking in a queer, jerky way, almost as though she were saying a lesson. "Sometimes I thought you cared for me and sometimes you've been awfully strange. I was so wretched about it all, that I spoke to Father Thrap-

stone and asked him to tell me if I could do anything—I'd no one else I could go to, and I felt that he cared for both of us—and he told me to tell you the truth."

She drew a deep breath. "You were telling me the truth when you asked me to marry you and said you loved me so much that you were frightened to death that the Tracey curse would come between us?"

He nodded his head, because he would have found it difficult to say anything.

"You give me your word of honour that you did?"

"Yes!" he muttered.

"And couldn't you see that I'd fallen in love with you, just as much as you had with me? Do you think I'd have let you kiss me as I did? Do you think I'd almost have asked you to kiss me, like I did when you told me how frightened you were about our not getting married, unless I'd loved you?"

John was looking dazed and stupid.

"Do you know why I threw Tom over?" She gave a strange little laugh: "Oh yes! He behaved badly, and wanted me to ask you to lend him money, and was awfully sorry for it by the next post—but

do you know why I threw him over? It was because I could never have married him, or anyone, after I knew I loved you! And do you know why I married you, John? It was because I could no more help saying 'yes,' than you could help asking me."

She had forgotten that Father Thrapstone was in the room; she had forgotten about everything except her husband. "John," she said—"about the life we're leading—I believe it's just because you think I don't love you—I didn't realise it until this morning. But if you've got some real reason, tell me and I shall be perfectly happy. I'd rather live with you—as your friend, than——"

He was staring down at his plate, as though he were perfectly dazed; but she looked at him until she forced him to raise his eyes to meet hers.

"If you want to go on living as—as friends—and tell me your true reason—I shall be perfectly—perfectly happy; but if you want me as your wife——" and all the pent-up love of the last four months found its way into the look she gave him. Then she rose and left the room quietly.

It was Father Thrapstone who opened the door for her. John was sitting at the table, trying to

concentrate his thoughts and prevent the room from growing misty and wavy.

"Go to her, man! Go to her!"—and John found that the Jesuit was shaking him roughly. He staggered up, and went quickly towards the door, gaining strength at each step.

THE END

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